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NOVEMBER  
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VOLUME 11  
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FANTASTIC  
ADVENTURES

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1948

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Front cover painting by Arnold Kohn, illustrating  
a scene from "Dimensions Unlimited."

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## *All Stories Complete*

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- DIMENSIONS UNLIMITED** (Novel—30,000) ..... by Berkeley Livingston..... 8  
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 Could six men simply vanish from the face of the Earth? From the *Earth*, possibly, but—
- DEATH'S HEAD** (Short—5,500) ..... by Chester S. Geier..... 60  
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 The head seemed harmless enough, minus a body—but one day its eyes blinked open . . .
- THE SPIRIT OF TOFFEE** (Novelette—20,000) ..... by Charles F. Myers..... 72  
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 Toffee thought spirits came only in a bottle—but she found there were other kinds . . .
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 Algernon Apflenod, like most men, wanted a peaceful life—but he had to die to find it
- THE RING OF FAITH** (Short—5,400) ..... by William P. McGivern.... 122  
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 The ring itself wasn't very valuable—but the things it could do certainly were! . . .
- THE CHARMING MR. GRANT** (Short—6,600) ..... by Lester Berkeley..... 134  
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 Mr. Grant was the life of every party—a very curious fact indeed, since he was dead . . .
- .....

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# The Editor's Notebook

## A CONFIDENTIAL CHAT WITH THE EDITOR

**T**HE big news this month is Berkeley Livingston's new science-fantasy novel. Yep, as we announced last issue, Berk is back with a new action-packed yarn. "Dimensions Unlimited" has everything in it that you have come to expect from the pen of Livingston. And that, judging from Berk's great popularity, is quite a bit! . . . The whole thing started when Lieutenant Corbett was given the job of finding six influential men who had disappeared. It seemed to be a routine case, the kind the police could handle without any trouble. But as Corbett began his investigation something happened, and he was whisked through time into an alien world. He found the missing men all right, but that was only the beginning of his trouble. What happened after that, and why it all happened is something you'll find out when you read the story. We'd just like to add that we welcome Berk back with a resounding cheer, and we'll bet you'll echo it!

**C**CHESTER S. GEIER, one of the most popular writers in our pages, returns this month with an unusual short story, entitled, "Death's Head." Chet can always be depended upon to come up with something different. This present yarn proves it. The story concerns a mummified head that a curious collector might prize. The only peculiar thing about this head was that it refused to die! Maybe you think that's too fantastic? Well, read the story first, and then decide. As an item of interest for all you Geier fans, we might let you in on a little secret. Chet informs us—and proudly—that he is going to become a father again. We'd like to extend our congratulations ahead of time.

**T**HE long awaited new "Toffee" story is our next piece of good news. Yep, Charles Myers came through with another fine story about his now famous, and very popular dream-girl. This new long novelette, "The Spirit of Toffee," is just about everything a "Toffee" fan could ask for. There's a laugh a minute as Toffee and Marc's ghostly friend, George, lead him on one of the wildest adventures of his life. We won't even give you a hint here at what the story's about. That would spoil everything for you, and we wouldn't want to do that, now, would he? We'd only like to say, as a sidelight, that your fan mail has been terrific on "Toffee" and that we guess we kinda called the shot when we said that

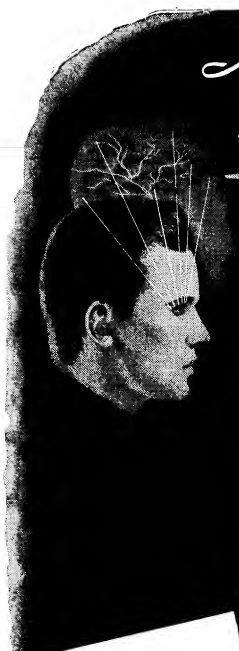
Charles Myers was in Thorne Smith's class. Right?

**G**ERALD VANCE has had a bad habit of staying away from FA's contents page for too long a time. That is being corrected right now, for this month he brings a humorous short story, "The Happy Death of Algernon Applepod." It's the story of a frightened little man who couldn't find peace on Earth. Where then was he to look for it? In Heaven? Well, Algernon Applepod's idea of heaven, and what it actually turned out to be is what makes the story a little gem. See if you don't agree with us.

**I**T'S always a pleasure to put Bill McGivern's name on the contents page. Bill is one of the great favorites of FA, and rightly so. This month he returns with an unusual short story entitled, "The Ring of Faith." It concerns a young man who saw a ring in a jewelry store window. As he stood there looking at it, it seemed as if a strange force took hold of his arm and compelled him to walk into the store and purchase the ring. He did so, and then his life began to change . . . This is one of those stories where destiny is changed by a single act. You'll understand exactly what we mean when you start reading on page 122. Let us know how you liked the yarn. (Bill informs us that he is hard at work upon a new novel. As you may know, Bill is making quite a name for himself as a writer of best-selling mysteries. Nice going, Bill.)

**L**ESTER BARCLAY walked in the other day and said cryptically: "The only charming people I know are dead ones." Naturally we wanted to know what he meant. He answered by smiling knowingly and then laid a manuscript on our desk. We looked at the title and saw: "The Charming Mr. Grant." Then, a little while later, after we had read the story, we knew what Les had meant. All of which should tell you that you've got a treat in store for you when you read the last story of this issue. Maybe you're one of those people who always read the last story first? Well, go ahead—you won't be disappointed!

**N**EXT month we'll bring you the new Lee Francis story, "Outlaws of Corpus." It's a great science-fiction story, with a terrific Smith cover. We'll see you then.....WLH



# In Your Mind's Eye

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**Six men had disappeared and it was up to Corbett to find them—but that wasn't so easy since their trail led into another dimension...**

His sword arm straightened in a lightning thrust, and the point of the blade found its target...



**M**Y HANDS left sweaty marks on the telephone, as I hung up. I could feel that all-too-familiar tic of my eye. If I only had a drink. Captain Rodney's voice still pounded in

my ear: "And remember, Corbett, this is your last chance. The Commissioner is getting awfully fed up with your excuses. Start finding those guys!"

Sure, find those guys. It took noth-



# DIMENSIONS UNLIMITED

by **BERKELEY LIVINGSTON**



ing to say that. But I was sweating my heart out in the effort and it was getting me nowhere. I began ticking them off in my mind, Wright, Connally, James—and a voice, soft, husky, troubled,

said:

“Lieutenant Corbett?”

I looked away from the scratch pad on which I'd been doodling, away from the world of missing people, and into a

pair of troubled blue eyes. Those eyes, somehow didn't go with the rest of the face. She had too much mascara on, too much lipstick and face make-up. And, her dress was too revealing. I knew her, Dottie Vee, night club chanteuse, wife of Tony Cella, public enemy number one. What the hell did she want?

"Yes," I said somewhat abruptly.

Her tongue licked at red-wet lips. "You've got to help me," she said.

I leaned back, closed my eyes and waited for her to continue.

"Tony's gone—Tony's disappeared. And you—" She stopped suddenly. She must have seen the expression of disgust on my face. "Please," she continued, and I saw the effort it took to go on, "I know how the police feel about Tony. But he's my husband, and," she burst into tears.

That got me. Maybe it was an act. Maybe it wasn't. But I could see she was in a mental turmoil about her rat of a husband's disappearance.

"Okay," I said, "let's have the facts."

Her brow furrowed in thought. "Well," she began, "for a long time Tony was thinking of quitting the rackets. Things were getting too hot. I don't have to tell you—you're a copper—but Tony was the brains of the outfit. He always hated when the muscle was used . . ."

"Never mind that," I said. "I know all about what he was. Just tell me why you think he's missing; and from what I can guess from your manner, missing permanently?"

She gulped audibly and went on, "All right. A week ago, last night, Tony stopped off at the Chez Felipe, where I work, and told me something big was going to happen. I never saw him so excited before."

"Do you remember what he said?" I broke in.

"I—I think I do. He said, '*Toots, I got a chance to make a million bucks, but fast. Now don't ask me how. I can't tell you here.*' Then I said, '*All right, I won't.*' And he said, '*That's my baby. Here's all I can tell you now. I got a package yesterday and in it was ten thousand dollars in hundreds. And a note telling me if I wanted ten times that to be at a certain place tonight. There was something else in the note, something we'll talk about later. Anyhow I'm going now to keep that appointment.*' He kissed me and left. That was the last I saw of Tony."

I opened my eyes and looked into hers. She wasn't kidding me. This was the truth, as far as she knew.

"All right," I said, "these are routine questions I've got to ask. You knew his friends, his pals, where he hung out, and so forth. Did you ask around?"

She had stopped crying. "Yes, oh, yes; I've asked and asked until I'm afraid to ask any more. I don't know where to go anymore. That's why I came to the police."

"And you say," I asked, "he didn't tell you where he was going to meet this party?"

"No!"

I scratched my head in perplexity. As if I didn't have enough troubles, this had to come along. Somehow I had the feeling that this wasn't going to be the usual gangster killing. And then I remembered what she'd said about the ten thousand dollars. That was odd. I knew six other men who had received that much money in the same fashion and had disappeared in much the same manner. Could it be . . .

But I didn't want to go back to thinking about those guys again. "All right," I said, "go back home and don't worry too much about this. It's probably nothing. At any rate I'll put some men to work on it, and I'll let you know

in a few days."

She said, "No—not home, it's easier to bear when I'm working."

The phone rang then and I nodded in dismissal. It was Rodney again. He wanted me in the office.

**I** THREW my cigar butt at the garboon and missed as usual. For once Rodney didn't say anything. Bill Rodney was the tallest, skinniest, meanest copper that ever breathed. And there was many a man who had tried to stop his breathing. But Rodney was the sort of man who would live to spite them all. He looked at me through those small, pale eyes that never seemed to blink, and said:

"Sit down, Corbett."

I sat and waited.

"Corbett," he began, "the commissioner isn't satisfied with the way things are going."

He began to tick off names on his fingers, "Wright, James, Dorel, Connally, Philips . . ."

"And Davis," I said, finishing the list. I knew them better than he ever would. Their appearance, habits, characteristics, idiosyncracies were something I had memorized, as if they were a ritual.

He gave me a sour look. "Yeah. Six guys. Not just ordinary guys but every one of them a big shot."

I blew my top then. "Aw, cut it out," I snapped. "What are you trying to do, give me a royal needle? I know their names; know all about them. And that's all. Hell! You know how I operate. Get the little facts in a man's life and nine times out of ten you'll know why he disappeared. The little facts, like whether he hated onions for breakfast, and his wife insisted he eat them. Or whether a man hated small rooms and they lived in a kitchenette. Those are the little things that can make a

man's life unbearable. Those are the things that will make him get up and run away. But do they hold true with these guys? No!"

"What are you doing, building up an alibi?" Rodney asked.

"No. I'm just fed up with the guff I have to take. You'd think I was responsible for their disappearance." I was mad clean through and no longer cared what anyone thought.

Rodney's thin, almost bloodless lips split in a grin. "No," he said, "we don't think you're responsible for their disappearance, but we do think the responsibility of finding them is yours. So I'm just telling you, one week is all you've got."

"And if I don't?"

"I'll break you. Send you out to the sticks where I think you belong."

There was nothing I could say. He was my boss. And he had the power to do as he said.

## CHAPTER II

**I** WALKED out of headquarters and straight over to the tavern on the corner. There was only one thing on my mind, get drunk. But it wasn't any good. I couldn't get those missing men out of my mind.

I sat at the bar and thought over again what I knew about them.

*John Wright:*

Young, only in his thirties, he was a full professor at Chicago University. At the time of his disappearance, he had achieved world acclaim in his field, physics, when he was awarded the Nobel prize. Immediately afterward he asked for, and received, a leave of absence from the University. He went up to Pennsylvania somewhere and after two weeks up there, came back. His movements from then on were a little hazy but not out of character. From

what I was able to piece together from the few friends he had, he was the sort of person who liked to get off by himself. Then, and this is what puzzled me, he just faded from view. Just like that.

*Allan James:*

Another professor, from Cornell, and as well known in his field as was Wright in his. He went into the land of the missing at about the same time. And he picked the city of Chicago to disappear from. There was a bigger stink raised about his getting lost than there had been about Wright. James was married and the father of two children. I had looked deeply into the background of his life and had found no earthly reason for him to walk off as he did.

*Mark Connally:*

He was the reason for my being put in the middle by Rodney. Connally was one of the wealthiest men in the country. I was able to trace his movements down to the very night of his disappearance. He had also been the last to go. And of them all, there was a guy who had the least reason. He had the world by the tail and I mean literally. I was never able to find out how many millions he had, but they ran into several hundred. His also was the strangest life I investigated. Of Irish descent, he came over with his parents when he was just a boy. An accident claimed the lives of both his parents and Connally had to go out into the world when most kids are starting grammar school. His early years were bitter, cruel, to him. He slept where he could and ate what he was able to scavenge from the refuse piles of restaurants. But even as a child he displayed that tenacity of purpose that brought him the millions of his later years. He learned early the value of money and the power it can bring and

what he learned then he never forgot. So that I couldn't understand why ten thousand dollars would interest him. And that was the thought that brought down the house of cards.

I had been able to establish a single and unusual fact. Each of these men had received a gift of ten thousand dollars from someone just before they disappeared. But that was a bag of beans to a guy like Connally.

Then the thought of that dough brought to mind the visit of Tony Cella's wife to mine. I decided to pay a visit to the Chez Felipe.

The Chez, at it was commonly called, was the best night club in town. I had been there more than once but tonight I wasn't interested in the girls or the floor show or the characters. I wanted to see Dottie Vee.

It was early, so I had the waiter call her to my table. She was dressed as she had been when she came to my office.

"I've been thinking about Tony," I said. Her eyes suddenly held a glimmer of hope. "Didn't he have a bodyguard?" I asked.

The question surprised her. "Why, yes. Some man they called Rod Terry."

"Anything wrong?" I asked.

"No . . . that is I don't know. After I left you tonight, I remembered something. Rod came in, after Tony left that night, and talked to me. He seemed worried."

"About Tony?"

"Yes. This Rod was a stupid sort of character, but he was nuts over Tony. He was more than a guard. He'd follow Tony around like some dogs follow their masters. Well, this night, he came in and he was worried. For the first time, Tony didn't want him around. And he told me he was going to follow him. That he was afraid Tony was going to get into a jam and he wanted to

be around when it happened. When I asked him why, he shut up like a clam."

I almost popped out of my chair at this news. "Where's this Rod now?"

Her shoulders slumped wearily. "I don't know," she said in a low voice. "I—I guess he found him."

There went another lead. That was the way it had been all along. I'd think I was getting somewhere, and then I'd hit a stone wall. There was no use asking her any other questions. She was a dried up well as far as I was concerned.

**A**S I STARTED up the steps leading to my office on the third floor, Sergeant Mullaney, head of the labor detail, joined me. There was a broad grin on his tough puss.

"Wanta hear something funny?" he said, grabbing me by my arm.

I wasn't in any mood for jokes. Not Mullaney's kind any way. I started to shake him off, but he went into his spiel. "A funny thing happened last week," he began. "We picked up Rod Terry, y'know . . ."

"Rod Terry," I yelled. "Holy cats! Where have you got him?"

Mullaney looked dumbfounded at me. I must have sounded like a madman to him.

"Come on!" I demanded again, "where is he?"

"Why, we shot him out to Rogers Park. What's the matter, Corbett? Is the guy hot?"

"Hot? That guy's dynamite. And he's going to save my job," I added.

### CHAPTER III

**T**ERRY didn't like me. I could see it sticking out in his chin, in the narrow way he looked at me. I was just another cop to him. I started to do something about that.

"I just want one thing out of you,"

I said. "Dottie Vee told me you ~~were~~ the last one to see her husband. At least the last one she knows of. I want to know where you saw him."

He was chewing gum and doing it like a cow chewing a cud, in slow, reflective motions. He cuddled the wad in a cheek then said, "Yeah, I was. So what?"

Hell! This ape was a goon. Giving me the business, that way.

"Look, stupe," I said. "I could turn you over to the boys. You know what that'd mean. But Dottie tells me you were a pal of Tony's. All I want to do is find him."

For a guy who was supposed to be such a terrific friend of this hood, he sure didn't act like it. He slumped lower in the chair and closed his eyes. I could see the scar tissue on the lids, souvenirs of the days when he was a fighter. Then he opened them, and regarded me through their pale blueness. It was a long look, filled with suspicion. Something about me must have satisfied him.

"Okay," he said. "I'll give out. Y'know, I used to tail Tony all the time. That was my job. Well, this night . . ."

"What night?" I broke in.

He squinted his eyes in thought. "A week ago yesterday. He calls me in the office and tells me he ain't gonna use me that night. Well, that don't go with me. Too many wrong guys out after him. So I tail him anyway. First off, he goes to the Chez. I waits outside and he comes out in a little while. Y'know where the Chez is. Well, he don't use the car this time. Nope, he starts out walking down Erie and me right behind him. I'm wondering what the hell he expects to find in that neighborhood. Pretty soon he comes to one of those warehouses. Then he takes a piece of paper out of his pocket and reads what's

on it. And then he walks into the joint.

"Jees, I didn't know what to do. Hell, if Tony got wise I was tailing him, he'd fire me. Then I figured that guy's like a kid when it comes to stuff like this. Too much guts f'r his own good. So, I trots in after him. We go up a couple of stairs to the third floor. He looks around and spots the joint he's bound for. It's a plain looking sort of place. He walks in and that's the last I see of Tony."

"What do you mean? The last you seen of him?"

"Just what I said. I stuck around there for at least an hour and Tony never came out. So I hot foots it down to a tavern on the corner—and the cops pick me up."

I got the picture then. Terry had gone to call for help. And Mullaney's men had picked him up. Terry had figured that if he told them the real reason for his being there, they'd go in for Tony. So he kept quiet.

I loosened the gun in my holster, nudged Terry forward. Despite his air of bravado, he seemed to lose it as we reached the door. His hand wasn't quite steady when he turned the knob. Darkness and silence greeted us, as we entered.

I thought it odd there was no watchman. We passed a row of freight elevators, turned left into a corridor that led to another entrance on St. Clair and continued until we reached a flight of stairs. Terry turned and nodded. This was the path Tony had taken. The gun felt good in my palm, as I motioned with it for him to go on.

It was three flights up, all right. Just a plain frosted door. No lettering on it, nothing to distinguish it from any of the others on the corridor. I stopped short and pulled Terry close to me.

"How do you know it was this door?"

"I saw him count off. Three doors from the stairs."

Pushing Terry aside, I opened the door hard, slamming it against the wall. It caromed almost closed. This time I shoved gently at it and walked in, Terry close to my shoulder.

The room was empty.

There was a wall switch next to the door. I flicked it on. If we'd expected to find anything, we were disappointed. There was nothing there; but there was, in the next room. I had turned to leave, when Terry exclaimed:

"Hey! Wait a minute. Look at this!" It was a cigarette holder. Tony's. Terry had seen light reflecting from something in the corner of the room. The holder had a silver band which bore the initials, T. C.

We looked at each other in bewilderment. Terry had said that Tony had never left the room, to his knowledge. Well, if he hadn't, then where was he then?

Maybe there was something we had missed? It took me several minutes to find it. The mystery proved to be a concealed door, the handle of which was concealed in a hidden slot in the wood. The hidden room was also empty. But this room had furniture at least. A desk and chair stood in the center of the room. Terry, sat in the chair while I examined the desk and its contents. The chair was close to the desk and Terry swung around to give me room to work. A five minute search showed the desk to be empty. Intent as I was on the desk, I paid no attention to Terry, behind me. So that when I turned and found him gone, I was astounded. I ran to the other room. It was as empty as when I had seen it last. But where was Terry?

It was enough to drive a man crazy, and I had not far to go, if this kept up. I sprawled out in the chair and

tried to rationalize. I swung around in the chair, idly, in half circles. Then I completed the circle. For a moment everything was clear, distinct. Then the room began to spin in ever narrowing circles, until the walls, ceiling, desk were a number of close lines, whirling around my head. And I blanked out.

#### CHAPTER IV

I GOT to my feet, dizzily. The room swam in circles before me. At last the room steadied. I looked about me in bewilderment. Where—almost, I had asked, *who*, was I? Instinctively, my hand reached for the short sword at my side. Then I knew I was alone. My head clear once more, I looked about the room, curiously. There was an oddly shaped table in the center of the room. Facing it was a chair of peculiar construction. Then I remembered.

The pursuit. Ter and I fleeing for our lives and Jomat and his men close behind. The valley offering its protection, and the strange hut in its center. We had gone in, I standing guard outside. Then when silence answered my call to Ter, I had entered. And found the room empty. I had sat in the strangely shaped chair and then . . . and then what? I didn't know. Then all thoughts were swept from me. The sound of feet outside.

I leaped for the door. Too late. It swung open.

"Rid," a voice shouted exultantly. "By Japet's beard, we have them both."

Standing full in the doorway, an unholy look of joy in his eyes was Gorma. And behind him, his motley crew of cutthroat outlaws. I was caught. Well, damn them to Muna's pit! I wasn't going to give in without a fight.

The sword felt good in my hands.

Gorma grinned. "No, Rid," he said.

"I cannot give you battle. Conly wants you alive."

Before I could give him proper answer, there was the sound of voices from the other room. Gorma's head came to attention, then he stepped aside and Jomat came into the room.

He faced me, a tall man, strongly built, but already given to fat. In his eyes and on his mouth a sneer. He was not afraid. No! Not with Gorma and his men behind him. Ah, if we were only alone. I would have satisfied the hunger of my sword then.

His beard parted and I saw the rotting yellow teeth.

"Bring him in," he called to someone in the other room.

They dragged Ter in. As if he was a stinking Rog from the forest. The room swam in a hed haze.

"No, Rid," Ter called to me. There was entreaty in his voice. Faithful Ter. Always the temper to the steel of my fury.

But the fury remained in my voice. "Jomat," I said softly. And I knew my voice trembled. "You have won—this time. But the next—"

"Your sword," he said. I knew what he meant. I threw it to the floor. Then Gorma stepped forward and bound me, as was Ter, so that I could not escape. I lay upon the floor and looked my hate at Jomat.

He stepped forward then, and kicked me. His shod foot struck me squarely in the mouth. Once, and again. And through the fog of my pain I heard Gorma cry, "'Tis enough. He is no beast. Treat him as a warrior, while I am here."

I shook my head, dumbly. My blood tasted salt in my mouth. Then my eyes cleared and I looked up at the two.

"Thanks, Gorma," I whispered through swollen lips. "I will not forget."

Jomat looked from Gorma to me then snarled, "Take them outside."

THE walls of Conly's city rose up before us. Within those walls there was the whole tribe of outlaws, thieves, and so-called warriors that made up Conly's following. And somewhere in the blue haze of hills behind us were the remnants of the revolt I had led.

We had been too few. So steeped in misery was the rest of Porta, that none of the other cities had answered my call to revolt. I had thought, better revolt and die as man should, with a sword in his hand, than like a muck-sheathed Rog in Muna's pit.

The massive gates swung open to Jomat's command, and we rode in. Above the clip-clop sound of our hames hooves, I heard the Musa's call.

A bitter smile ringed my lips. Once the Musa had called men to worship a God, peace loving and gentle. Then Conly had seized power and our God had become one of hate, destruction and vengeance. But the priests did not hate Conly. Not they. Did he not give them their sacrificial victims. Aye, we had once worshipped God with loving words but now it was with blood.

I had become lost in thought and did not notice that we had arrived at our destination, Conly's palace. Gorma slit the bonds of my legs and set me upon my feet. Then, with guards upon all sides, we marched into the palace.

I was quick to notice the guard. And I laughed aloud in derision. Someone struck me a savage blow, knocking me to my knees. Hands pulled roughly at me, jerking me erect again.

"Bring him up here," a hoarse voice growled.

Then I was face to face with Conly. He sat, chin cupped in one fat hand. His short, parted in the middle beard projected over the fat fingers. He was

seated in a wide throne-like chair that was set on a dais that was raised several feet above the palace floor. There was a brooding quality in the eyes that so steadily looked into mine.

"You have led us a fine chase, my friend," he said.

"And now that you have me," I said, "what do you intend to do?"

His answer was to the point and left no doubt as to what he thought.

"Do? You jest. There is only one place for such as you, Muna's pit."

In those few words, he had condemned me to a fate worse than death. Yet neither in voice or manner, did he show the slightest emotion. He might as well have said, "I like my meat lean," for all the importance he seemed to attach to my capture. But I knew differently. He had not sent out that large number of men, simply to bring in a few unimportant slaves from one of the slave cities of Porta. I knew what his intention was.

There had been rumors that some of the palace guard were not so loyal as Conly imagined them to be. So he had to treat me as if I was unimportant. As if I was a common criminal. If he brought the fact to them that I was the leader of an almost successful revolt, there was the possibility that some might remember, and later, act on it. There had been some who had escaped Muna's pit.

I laughed aloud at his words. And spat on the floor.

"Muna's pit," I made light of the sentence, "will hold me so long as that spittle remains wet."

And a new voice came into the picture.

"A favor, Conly?"

I had been intent only on Conly. So much so, that I had not noticed the two who flanked the throne. One was strange, yet oddly familiar. He was



like a figure seen in a dream that had faded from mind yet at the moment of awakening, was real. Above average height, he was of a lean suppleness that spelled strength. Strength, too, lay in the setting of his chin and the way he held his head.

It was not he who had spoken, however. I had recognized the one who had. It was Coll! Coll the Bloody! Coll the Butcher! Conly's scourge! The only man on Porta who was more hated than Conly.

"Ask, Coll!" Conly commanded.

HE LOOKED at me first, eyes burning bright in blood-lust, nostrils flaring in the great beaked nose, as if he was already satisfying his brute lust. "Give the prisoners to my keeping," he said.

Gone was Conly's mood of brooding watchfulness. Coll's words had struck the proper chord. Clapping a broad hand to a fat thigh, Conly broke out in a great bellow of laughter.

"Ho, ho! Granted, Coll. That should provide excellent sport. One thing, when you are ready for sport, I must be there."

Coll nodded, grimly.

The words in my throat stuck there. It was Ter, gentle, ugly Ter, who answered for me.

"So we are to provide sport for Conly," he said, in a voice low with suppressed passion. "But that is to be expected of the man who has all of Porta at his disposal—for sport. Aye, Conly, we have all been slaves! But the terror you once held for us is no longer. We no longer are slaves! We are free men all! Even in Muna's pit!"

"Good man." Only I heard the voice behind me. I recognized it. And was surprised. For it was Gorma who had spoken. Then my attention was brought back to the throne.

Coll's face had become ashen, at Ter's words. Then the blood returned and crimsoned the ugly mask. And with a single bound, he cleared the dais. His mouth spat curses, as he lifted the quirt at his side and brought it down across Ter's face. Ter fell back, bound hands vainly trying to protect his face. But the Rog hide thongs whipped past his arms and bit deeply into the skin. Coll lashed him again and again, until crimson threads laced their way down Ter's torn face.

My muscles swelled in all their might against my bonds. I held my hands low in front of me and twisted hard. Once and again and felt the strands of hide give. Then they parted as if they were made of air—and I was on Coll.

I had no weapon. They had taken my sword from me. But my two hands were sufficient for what I had in mind. I twisted Coll about. He was as a child in my arms. I looked deeply in his eyes and saw the raw fear that lay there. And my heart sang at the sight. Slowly, my fingers closed about his throat. Closed until they almost met.

"Die," I whispered, my mouth close to the straining head. "It isn't pleasant to die, is it?" I felt his vain squirming. Heard his labored breath, and it was music in my ears. Then my knee was in the small of his back—and the world exploded in a flash of brilliant light.

## CHAPTER V

DIMLY, I heard a voice say, "Enough! And when his senses return drag him away!"

My tongue licked lips that were so swollen, they didn't seem to be my own. And the mere touch of my tongue on them sent waves of pain through me. I had to get to my feet. It was not right that Rid, who had never bent his knee

to any man's will, should lie craven on a tyrant's ground. It took all the will I possessed to get to my hands and knees. But beyond that, I could not go, not if all Porta depended on me. I looked up at the three standing watchfully above me. I know my mouth moved but no words came out. Yet in the eyes of the man who had stood on Conly's right, the man who had been a stranger to me, there was the oddest expression. As if he had seen, or heard the impossible. Then hands grasped me below my armpits and I was hoisted to my feet.

Coll shook in the grip of his fury. He would have killed me then had it not been for Conly. I grimaced in a painful smile, when I saw the still red marks of my fingers on Coll's throat. Another few seconds and vengeance would have been mine. Then Conly's minions dragged me off.

Muna's pit! A vast mine, it covered half of Porta. But it was more than just a mine. Rumors had been circulated that the ground contained active ingredients of some unusual mineral. Whether the rumors had some basis in fact, I did not know. But that men died from some mysterious reason, after too long a contact with the mysterious minerals was well established.

The pit lay deep within the earth. It extended for immense distances on all sides. And it was said of it, that for every foot of ground, there was a dead man. Each of the six cities of Porta had an entrance to the pit. Mort, Conly's city had the largest, as befitted the ego of the man.

They dragged us down to the barracks of the slaves; huts, so filthy, so barren of even the smallest luxuries, that it was hard to believe they were meant for humans.

Ter and I were flung to the ground of the hut, as if we were sacks.

"Here," said the guard, "are two more who talk too much."

And from the darkness came the answer, "Good. A few more and we may be heard."

I felt hands slide over me. Felt fingers fumbling with my bonds. Then my hands were free. I arose, stretching cramped muscles, easing the torture of the constricting bonds. I could feel the movement of people around me. There was illumination. And it took me a while to accustom my eyes to the darkness. When finally I could distinguish shapes I counted the figures of ten men, besides Ter.

"Who answered the guard," I asked.

One of the figures arose and stepped to my side. Of middling height, he stood squarely before me. I could not see his face but I had no need to. His voice told me all I needed to know.

"I gave the guard answer," he said. "Did it please you?"

I managed to grin. There was something in the man's voice that warmed me.

"Aye," I answered. "Would there were more like you."

"There are," he answered. "Many. But they are scattered and torn by personal fears. I, my friend, fear no one."

"And you?" I asked. "Who are you?"

"My name is Wright, John Wright."

The name meant nothing to me. It was the man and the way he talked. Here was someone on whom I could depend. I knew it, yet I had neither seen nor heard of him before.

"And you?" he asked.

"I am Rid. Called outlaw by Conly," I answered, "and beside me is Ter my friend."

A murmur of something like approval went up at my announcement. So there were some here who had heard of me. Good. I would remember when the

time came. For I had no doubt that the time would come when I would try to escape.

"We have heard of you, Rid," Wright said. There was respect in his voice. "Here," he continued, "sit by me."

Ter and I sat, hands clasped loosely about our knees and waited for Wright to speak what was on his mind. The rest grouped themselves around us.

It was Ter who spoke first. I smiled to myself. Ter the curious. I could always depend on him to break the ice.

"Wright?" he said speculatively. "The name has not a familiar ring. For what assumed crime were you sentenced to the pit?"

Wright's voice gurgled in laughter. "Crime? Yes of course it was a crime—to cross Conly's will. And the crime itself—well, I never knew philanthropy was a crime. Not until Conly was kind enough to point it out as such."

"Philanthropy?" I asked sharply. "How is that?"

"This," he paused as if searching for a word. "This world you live in can be made into a heaven of productivity, if the mineral wealth it possesses were put to a proper use."

I couldn't make out his face in the almost complete darkness of our prison. So I didn't see if he was having fun at my expense, but there was no doubting the sincerity of his voice. But before I could inquire into the mystery of what he said, a voice called:

"Sleep! To bed, slaves, else you feel the lash."

**TO BED!** It was to laugh, that.

Nothing but the hard earth for pallet or pillow. And for cover, the dank air of our dungeon fastness. But I had known the hard earth of the forest and the rock for a pillow, so I found it not too much of a hardship. Sleep

came quickly.

A hand, tugging at my shoulder, roused me to wakefulness. The semi-darkness of the night had given way to soft glow of light that, although not of the brightness of sunlight, was yet enough to cast out the shadows of the night.

**T**HERE were twelve of us, together.

I ran my eyes over the motley group, seeking to find those who could be put to use later, when I would make my break for freedom. I found four who I felt sure would have no compunction about slitting a few throats when the time came.

"Well, my friend," said a small, slender man, "what do you think of us?"

I recognized the voice as belonging to the man called Wright but was surprised at the sight of him. Somehow I had expected a larger man, an older man. But this Wright had no more years than I. And the substance. Small, slender to the point of emaciation, he looked as if a small wind would blow him away. Then I looked deep within his eyes and saw the indomitable courage writ there. Here was no weakling, fearing the bite of the lash. There was no room for fear in all that small body.

"I have seen worse," I said. "How do they look . . ."

A voice hissed a warning as shadows came across the threshold of our hut.

We turned, as one, to face those who were coming to visit us. I heard Ter gasp, beside me. For entering our hut was Coll, Jomat and Gorma. In advance of the three came a half dozen guards who held short, wide-bladed swords. These pressed us back against the hut walls. I felt that familiar tic of a jaw muscle, felt the palms of my hands become wet with sweat and knew the frustration of my anger.

There was a patent gloating in the look Jomat cast in my direction. But it was Coll who was the leader. And it was Coll who told us what was in store for us.

He carried a six-thonged whip in his hand and as he spoke, he swished it around, its metal tips rattling against the Rog hide of his war harness. There was a sneer in his voice, as he said:

"Ah! What have we here? Is it that noble warrior, Rid? And is that Ter, beside him? Well, where are the brave words today?"

My lips, still swollen, framed a reply, then I realized that was what Coll wanted. For when he saw my mouth open the whip in his hand became still. I felt sure there would be other moments.

"Answer, damn you!" Jomat screamed in sudden fury. It was as if he had been cheated out of some promised sport by my silence and hoped to infuriate me into saying something that would force Coll to the use of the whip.

My grin was more of a grimace. He stepped forward with an oath but before he reached me Coll thrust him back.

"Later," Coll said. And in his voice was the promise of torture to come. "Do not be so impatient. He'll find his voice. But when he does, he may not recognize it."

Then he turned and strode out of the hut. Jomat and Gorma followed.

The guards herded us outside, where for the first time I saw the confines of our prison camp. We had been blindfolded when they led us down. Now I saw what our problem was.

This was the workers' compound, a little settlement of some twenty huts. The huts were ranged against the wall of that level of the pit to which we had been brought. Now all the inmates were

assembled under the watchful eyes of guards. At one end of the level was the incline leading to the exit. At the other was an incline leading to the bowels of Muna. And at that end a number of metal cars stood waiting to transport us to the workings.

The problem was a simple one. Gain control of both exits. It was the solution that bothered me. For at one end were at least a hundred guards, armed with sword, bow and arrow. The other end led to nowhere.

A HALF-DOZEN slaves, so miserable in appearance, I could hardly believe my eyes, made their entry. They bore trays on which were a number of bowls. These were passed out among us. They contained a gruel that was mostly water. But hungry men eat. And I was hungry.

I noticed Coll and his henchmen in a whispering huddle while we were eating. Something in the way they looked at us, while they conversed, made me uneasy. Something was in the air, something that boded us ill.

"I don't like the way they're looking at us," Wright said in a whisper.

"Nor do I," I replied.

Coll approached, swaggering as usual, his face wreathed in a false smile.

"I have important news for all of you," he began unctiously. "Your *loved* leader, Conly, has given you signal honor. Because he has his friends, Rid and Ter to help him with the work you are so nobly engaged in doing, he has assigned you to that level of Muna known as . . ."

Horried voices whispered a frantic, "No! No! Not that! You can't!"

"No . . . The Pillow!" Coll finished softly.

Ter and I looked at each other wonderingly. What was this Pillow that seemed to inspire so much terror?

I noticed that even Wright had lost color, at the mention of the name.

Jomat suddenly burst into a loud laugh.

"What's so funny?" I snarled.

"That's it," he wheezed. "There's nothing funny in it."

"Enough!" Coll commanded. "To work."

Suddenly there was a scream from one of the men in our group. I whirled at the sound. There was madness in that sound. A tall, thin man was stooped over, his face contorted in a mask of indescribable horror.

"Ah-h!" his voice rose in a crescendo that froze me to my marrow. Then he was off in a mad run for the far exit. One of the guards leaped forward to intercept him. It was a mistake that he paid for with his life. For the madman somehow snatched the sword from his hand and with a lightning stroke, beheaded him. And in that instant of frozen movement, I went into action.

Beside me was a guard, like the rest, watching the other. Even as I snatched the sword from his lax fingers, I yelled: "Get their weapons, men!"

Ter acted almost as instinctively as I, as did Wright. In the few seconds before I went into action, I saw that every man in the compound had moved at my command. It was as if they had been waiting for a signal.

Of the three, only Gorma challenged us. I wanted Coll. But between us were a half-dozen guards. In my heart was a song and on my lips was the chant that men had come to know me by.

"One in the throat and one in the belly. Drink, drink of my sword." And as I sang, I thrust and slashed until of the six who had faced me, there was only one left. Ah! But he was a warrior! Almost, I felt sorry that he had to die. The others knew only to

slash but this one was a swordsman. Twice he broke through my guard. Only the speed of my footwork saved me. Then, for the barest second he was out of position and my sword drank deeply of the blood in his throat.

I stepped away from the corpse and looked about me. Everywhere men were fighting for their lives. Somehow Ter and the rest had driven Coll and his men back until they were fighting almost at the incline to the lower tunnel. Something made me turn, and what I saw put wings to my feet. The guards at the upper end had stayed away from the battle. And whoever was in command, had called to those guards fighting us to retreat. Then, when there was a clearance for the bowmen, they went to work.

**I**T WAS sheer slaughter. There was no defense against the arrow shower that fell among them. And I saw the only thing that could save us. Our little group had been joined by the occupants of two other huts. Altogether there were perhaps twenty of us. Opposing us were three guards, Coll, Jomat and Gorma.

"Quick!" I commanded. "Disarm them."

It took a moment. Then herding them before us we made our way to the tunnel cars. The bowmen were afraid to let their bolts loose, for fear of striking Coll or one of the others. I had counted on that.

I saw the cars were large enough to take us all. But I had another idea then. Splitting up the men I divided them among three cars. And in each, I put one of the three leaders. Gorma rode with me. But first I sent them on ahead. Just before I sent them off, I called Ter, Wright and two others to my side.

"When the cars start off," I said,

"the arrows will begin to fall. Use the side of the remaining cars for protection. We must roll it over on to the rails so they will be delayed in their pursuit."

I had seen that the tunnel had only a gentle slope at the beginning. If we could make short work of tipping the car, we would still have time to get on the last one. And by the time they righted the turned over car, we would be out of sight. After that—well, we would see.

It didn't take long. The car had little weight. The five of us clambered aboard the gentle rolling vehicle just in time.

We moved in darkness. Ahead, I could hear the sound of wheels. The darkness was so complete, I could only make out the faces of my companions with an effort.

"Where do these rails lead?" I asked.

Wright replied, "There are two levels in this section. We'll hit the first soon. And I only hope there are no guards at the entrance. Then we turn. Then . . ." he paused.

"Yes?"

" . . . The Pillow."

I digested that in silence. I was beginning to *want* to see this dread thing.

"Not a pleasant thing, The Pillow," Gorma suddenly spoke from the darkness of a corner. "When Conly desires to rid himself of someone, he sentences him there."

I was tired of mystery. "All right," I said bitingly. "I'm a child, terrified of this bogey. So let's keep it a mystery. Perhaps, later, when I'm grown, you will tell me of this thing."

I could almost *feel* Wright's grin, as he answered:

"You're right, we are acting childish. There's no bogey there. But there is, and here I go, putting myself in the middle again, a radio-active mineral

there. Too long a contact with it produces a condition, h'm, well, like being baked over a fire for too long. If you follow me?"

His words didn't make sense and I said so.

There was an odd note of sadness in his voice, when he replied:

"There were some who understood. James, Dorel, Phillips. But they are gone. And the rest are different personalities. Excuse me, Rid, I wander. You see, unless one is a chem . . . I mean scientist, The Pillow is hard to explain. So let it go for the present."

Well, I was no scientist. But neither was I a fool. There was something in the Pit that held danger for us all. I feared it not.

"Ho!" cried a strange voice. "I have seen the living dead walk from that hell-hole. Aye, they were young, fresh, when they went in. It wasn't long and they returned, wasted as the old are. I saw the flesh, aged and wrinkled. Soon they joined their fathers."

But now we had reached that first level of which Wright had spoken. Ten times as large as was the first, it held only a narrow, board area for a landing. I saw hundreds of men at work in the short space of time it took to traverse the board strip.

**I**T WAS evident that we were not expected, for the few guards that were there gave only a casual glance at the first car. But as it passed without stopping, as did the second and third, they raised an outcry. It was too late, however. For in the few seconds it took to collect their wits, we had passed and were on our way to that turning which led to the much feared Pillow.

Then we were in the tunnel. And I noticed the difference immediately. The previous one had been dark. But here the walls glowed with a strange light.

It shimmered and danced from ceiling and floor. And it bathed our faces in a pale luminescence that made us look as pale as the dead. The weird light increased, as we went hurtling along. I felt my heart tighten in my breast. And when I looked at my companions I saw that they too were affected.

Gorma spoke from the side of his mouth:

"The land of the living dead. Outlaw and Prince are alike here, Rid. The sword is of no avail."

I felt my chin drop. Gorma a *philosopher!*

Ter said, "What of those who escaped?"

I saw Gorma shake his head.

"Have you ever known one?" he asked.

Ter was silent. There was no answer to that. Neither of us had ever met one. Perhaps it was a lie, invented by Conly, to lend a false hope to those unfortunates who had been sentenced. And I could well believe that of Conly.

Suddenly, from one of the cars ahead, we heard shouting voices. And then, high above the sound of the wheels, there came the death scream of a man. And as we went by that spot, I caught the momentary glimpse of someone flattened against the side of the tunnel wall. But who the man was, I did not see.

But now there were more important things in the offing. We had reached our destination—and the welcoming committee, in the persons of the guards. Someone in our car applied the brakes and I found myself in the turmoil of a battle royal.

The two cars in the lead had already disgorged their men and they were already engaged in battle. Swords gleamed oddly in the strange light. Men's faces were masks of strangely colored flesh, distorted in hate, filled

with blood-lust. I had time only to set two men to guard Gorma and I had joined the rest.

We were outnumbered. But there was no holding up to the sheer savagery of our onslaught. They fought until, panic stricken, they fled to the safety of their quarters at the rear. But there were only a few who had managed to escape, and of these, we had taken their weapons. Ter, his slender body panting, a blood-stained sword in his hand, grinned up at me.

"What now?" he gasped.

I took in the situation in a quick glance. We had not lost as many as I had supposed. And now we were armed properly. For some of the men had bows and arrows. Three of the men had appointed themselves as executioners and were walking among the wounded guards dealing out quick deaths. My heart felt no pity for them. This was war.

**T**HEN I became aware of the silence. The pleadings of the wounded were stilled and over the narrow field of our battleground hung a silence that was strange. Too, there was an absence of life that wasn't natural. I saw the pits, dug by men at work. Saw the tools; spades, shovels. But of the men who should have been there, there was nothing.

Then we heard it. The sound of men in battle. It came from beyond the natural arch of an overhanging rock. And I heard Gorma's harsh cry:

"Josa! My brother! Conly lied . . . Rid! My word, I am with you in this. Let me free."

I didn't hesitate. Gorma had two thousand men who would follow him into the jaws of death.

"Loosen his bonds," I commanded.

Then he was at my side. And with a shout, I made for the arch and what

was beyond. We charged across the gleaming Borium, I in the lead, Gorma and Ter at my side. We slithered to a halt at the entrance. Here was darkness that extended for a short distance. To go blindly charging out into I knew not what, wasn't sensible. Perhaps there were guards there, whose purpose was to take care of just such a possibility.

I gathered them about me, and when they were in a close group, looked them over carefully. There were six who took my instant attention. They stood apart from the rest, for one thing. And they were the only ones armed with bow and arrow. One, short, with wide shoulders and thick arms, stood a little in advance of the rest. I saw he had more years than any of the others.

But before I spoke what was on my mind, I saw something that erased all else from it. Jomat, bound with someone's harness, was there, as was one of the two guards. But Coll and the other guard were not. The leader of the bowmen answered the question in my eyes.

"Aye. The Butcher got away. We forgot them in the excitement and when they leaped from the car we were taken by surprise. I was able to get the guard. But Coll found refuge behind a rock and my arrow passed him."

I looked at Jomat.

The bowman intercepted my glance and said:

"This one"—his voice held contempt—"was too craven. He could only cower in a corner and beg for his miserable life."

I knew then, that we had little time. Coll would bring reinforcements.

"How shall I call you?" I asked the bowman.

"I am Horlat, once head of the King's own archers. These men are all that are left of the three hundred we once were."

So this was Horlat! Who had not

heard of him and his famous archers, the deadliest in all our world. And of the son of the king of Puto. Conly had sold the son the idea that the king was too old. And that the son would make a better Regent than his father. Of course when betrayal came, he was immediately thrown into Muna's pit.

All this passed through my mind, as I was issuing my orders:

"Horlat, you and your men will be in the van. Scatter, so that you will be more effective. The rest of us will follow close behind . . ." I caught sight of Wright's face just then and noticed the look of incredulity that it bore. I guessed, correctly, the reason for it. ". . . can't help it, Wright. I don't know how soon Coll will be back. And so we must take the chance. It may be all or nothing. But we must take the gamble."

WRIGHT nodded soberly. Then I proceeded to outline my plan. It was quite simple. I didn't know, of course, how many men there would be to oppose us, but whatever their number, I proposed to drive a wedge into them. Each of us there knew how little chance we stood. For second, I looked into each face and in each face was that which I had hoped to see there. The look that told me, come what may, these men were committed to a course from which there was no turning. Then, I gave the command.

Silently we charged. Until we came into that which I was to know as The Pillow. We had heard the shouting and the clash of arms. It was hard to judge how many men were involved, solely from the sound. So, when we arrived on the scene, we were not surprised at how few there were involved.

The rebels had been backed up against an outcropping of Borium. They were above the guards opposing



them. And facing us, Horlat, a wide grin on his face, stepped forward, his men moving slowly, confidently into position. Silently, each man fitted an arrow across the bow. There was only the smallest sound, as the arrows were released nor was there any sound from the men who were the targets. They fell in their tracks.

And as the first arrows were released, Gorma's bellow reached the people on the ledge:

"Josa! This way!"

Then the guards turned and saw us. There was no time for them to do anything about it, for we were already on them. Now it was each man for himself, a condition that I gloried in. No sword play was necessary here. It was slash and stroke. Strength was what mattered. And I gloried in mine. I chanted my song of death as our two small forces merged into one.

Now there were only a few left. Gorma, Ter and I had been joined by Josa. We were one small group. Wright and some of his friends were another. That was the way we were disposed, in small, compact groups. That had been my plan of attack.

"Drive in and cut off small groups of them. Don't give them any rest," I had said. And now I saw how well my plan had succeeded.

I was busy with two tyros, maneuvering them into position for the kill, when I heard a warning voice behind me; "Rid!" Then something struck me a savage blow on my forehead . . . and I knew no more.

## CHAPTER VI

**A**T THE sound of the musical tone-beat, the time will be eight o'clock, Bulova watch time."

Now what the hell made me think of that? Then I realized that I was awake

—or rather, conscious. I lifted my head and moaned in pain. Something bit the side of my skull. I had been slugged! So that's how I had passed out at the warehouse. Somebody'd sneaked up on me and had used a sap.

But where the hell was I? And who were these refugees from Hollywood? They all looked like characters from out of Robin Hood. I looked around for Errol Flynn—and felt my jaw go slack. For bent over me, his face screwed up in concern, was—John Wright! And on the other side of me was Rod Terry. What kind of shenanigans were these?

Their faces lit up when they saw I was okay and Wright, with Terry assisting, helped me to my feet.

"F'r the love o' mud," I said, "where you been?"

Wright's pan went blank at my question.

"Yeah. You," I said. "John Wright. The guy the whole police force's been looking for."

"Rid!" Terry yelped. "What is wrong?"

"Say," I snarled, "who gave you the right to call me by my first name?"

Then I looked around and felt my stomach turn. Holy cats! *What was this?* These swords. They were real! And these men lying around were *dead!* I'd seen enough of stiffs to be able to know one. And these guys laying around weren't playing.

Some big guy, with a pair of shoulders that would have got him a scholarship at any college, said:

"Perhaps he has lost his senses?"

Well, maybe I did and maybe I didn't. But I sure as hell would if someone didn't smarten me up and soon.

Then Wright whispered something to Terry, who took the big-shouldered lug aside and relayed the information

to him. While all this was going on, Wright took my arm and said:

"We don't have time for a full explanation. But don't worry, you're in safe hands. And as soon as we make certain that the pursuit will be met with the proper attention, I will explain in all detail what this is all about."

Gibberish! Plain gibberish! Or was it? Maybe I was the one who was nuts.

I looked around and saw we were in some kind of mine. There were three large dump trucks set on rails. I knew it was a mine of some sort but what kind puzzled me. While some of the characters set about turning the cars over, Wright pulled me to one side.

"Over here, on the ledge," he said.

We sat down and he began:

"Who are you?" he asked, first of all.

I told him, and started to go into why I was looking for him. But he stopped me cold.

"Never mind that," he said. "How did you get here?"

So I told him about Dottie Vee and Rod Terry and Tony and all the rest. He listened this time without interrupting me. And when I was through, said:

"There are three you can scratch off your list, James, Dorel and Phillips. The rest are here. I don't think, though, they will know what you will be talking about when you mention who and what you are. No. Wait. There is one who will, Davis."

"What do you mean?" I asked.

I noticed that he kept one eye on me and the other on the guys busy with the dump cars. Even when he answered me, he still kept looking their way.

"Just this. Because of Davis, you are here. Ah!" he suddenly yelps, "Our friends are approaching. Now listen, Corbett. These people know you as Rid, the outlaw. When you came into this dimension, there was a body for

you. The body of this man, Rid. Believe me man, you are two people at one and the same time. And right now the most important one is Rid."

"Why?"

"Because you are their leader in this lost cause. And when those men come through . . ." his voice trailed off.

"You mean those guys are out to knock—us off?"

He nodded.

Well, it looked like the present business was the most important. So I gave the place the once over.

"Those guys with the bows and arrows, are they good?"

"Yes."

"Then tell 'em to get behind those cars."

"You tell them. You're their leader."

Well, back in Chicago I was a police lieutenant. When I opened my trap, it was just like I was giving orders to a detail:

"You archers! Get behind the cars and don't let a single man get through. The rest follow me."

I HAD seen that the entrance to this section of the mine was shaped like a large mouth. A pouting mouth, with lips stuck out for several feet. In fact, the upper lip projected a good five yards and in such a manner that whoever was on it wouldn't be seen by those coming through. I had already taken count of men at my disposal. Thirty-three against I didn't know how many. But so long as they didn't send too many against us, we had the element of surprise.

For the first time I noticed the sword in my hand and had to smile at the sight. What the hell did I know about a sword? Now if I had a .38, well, that would have been different. And that brought another thought to mind. How had I got these clothes?

"Hist," Wright whispered. "Here they come."

They came, big men, dressed in leather shorts and jackets that were coated with some sort of metal. Most of them sported beards that hung well past their chins. They came in waves, six in a row. And that's the way they fell. Man, those archers were deadly. Those poor lugs looked silly, somehow, each with an arrow neatly splitting his beard. Four of those waves hit and each just crumbled. The dead piled up at the entrance until I wondered how even a single man could get through. But they just kept coming until sheer weight of numbers forced an entrance.

They forced an entrance because, whoever was their leader, finally realized that they had to have some sort of protection, if the attack was going to be a success. So, some sort of large metal shield preceded them. The arrows weren't made that could penetrate that thing. From above we could see and remain unseen. I watched, with a grin on my puss, how they were careful to remain out of sight even to the business of pushing the thing in on their knees.

I signalled the boss of the archers to make his getaway, when I saw that their usefulness was ended. It was up to us, now. I waited until I saw that they were well into the place before I gave the signal to attack.

I didn't have to tell them what to do. They seemed to know by instinct. The surprise was perfect. I landed right on the shoulders of some guy. One swipe and he fell, dead. Then I was busier than a one-armed paper hanger with the hives. Those metal embroidered jackets they wore stopped a sword thrust cold. I found that out in a hurry and almost lost my life in so doing.

After I knocked off my first man, I whirled just in time to grab a second by his beard and yank him to me. The sword I was using wasn't very long. In fact it was like a wide-bladed dagger. And that was the way I used it, to stab. But the point just slithered off his jacket. And right out of my hands. But I still had a good hold on that mop of a beard. He was big, big as me, but I yanked him forward against my chest. He tried to bring his sticker up, but we were too close for that. And when he brought up that sword, I pulled him forward, off balance. Then I was behind him and had an old-fashioned headlock on him. My right leg went in behind his knee and then I applied leverage. The vertebrae cracked with the sound of breaking wood.

THEN someone landed on my back and I went down on hands and knees. Whoever it was sounded like he was off his nut. He was growling just like a dog worrying a bone. And I was the bone. He had one arm around my chest, so I rolled down hard on it. He must have just struck with his sword, because my unexpected move made him lose it. Then I bridged and he went sailing off. But he must have had cat blood in him. He landed on his back but in the blink of an eye he was on his feet. So was I. We were even then.

He came in low, like a football player. I sidestepped and clipped him across the back of the neck with the side of my palm. He went down . . . and so did I. One of his hands had grabbed me by an ankle. I grabbed for the beard and he took my hand and twisted it away from him as if it was made of putty. Then his hand found my throat and steel cables began to twist themselves around the flesh. I arched, pivoting on my head, but his other hand

found a grip, too. He got to his knees, lifting me with him. I felt the blood heat my eyeballs, felt my throat convulse and knew that unless I did something, but quick, I was a gone goose. Then my mind stopped working and I was just an animal, fighting as an animal fights, with fangs and claws.

But that damned grip on my throat kept choking the life from me. I grabbed at his hands, felt my nails dig into the skin on his wrist, saw a black shape descend on us . . .

"Rid! Rid!" Someone was shaking me. Someone was calling, "Rid." And I opened my eyes.

I tried to open my mouth but the effort was too much for me. I could only shake my head weakly and hold up my hand asking, silently, for assistance.

Gorma pulled me erect, smiling when he saw that I was none the worse for wear.

Weakly, I said, "Thanks, my friend. I have you to thank, I think?"

His bearded face split in a wide grin at the words.

"Aye," he said. "No thanks are needed. This evens us up for Josa."

"Josa? Who's he?" I asked. My voice was regaining its strength. I knew this was Gorma. But who was this Josa he was thanking me for?

His eyes narrowed, then went wide as a sudden thought struck him.

"You feel all right?" he asked.

Then I knew what made him act like that. He thought I had lost my mind.

"Sure," I answered quickly. "Guess that guy beat me around pretty bad for a few minutes, that's all."

I shook his hand loose and looked around to see how we made out in the battle. Not so good. We had lost more than half our men. Then I saw that I had been out for a while because the bodies that had been piled up at the

entrance were gone now. And in their place were the cars.

"They ran," Gorma answered the question in my eyes. "But they weren't as many as when they came," he added, smiling as if he were quite pleased with himself.

I whistled sharply, when I saw the pile of bodies, stacked up to my side. We hadn't done so badly after all. And now most of the men had those metal harnesses on. I looked around. There was Rod Terry, or Ter as they called him, and the leader of the archers and . . . but where was Wright? Then I saw him, coming from the pile of corpses. He was buckling on a harness he had just taken from one of the corpses.

WRIGHT started past the cars piled up at the entrance, then came to an abrupt halt, his head turned in the direction of the tunnel. There was something in his attitude I didn't like. I met him halfway.

"What's wrong?" I asked.

He answered in a single word, "Look." But it was all he needed to say. A faint wisp of smoke came eddying toward the roof. They had started fires going and were fanning the smoke into our section. There was no defense against that. I looked again and saw it wouldn't be long before they had us. Already the smoke was billowing into the place as if from a giant bellows.

The men gathered around me as if they were expecting me to perform a miracle. There wasn't anything funny in it yet I wanted to laugh. What did they think I was, God? I looked upward, why, I didn't know. Perhaps to pray? I don't know whether my intentions were holy, but what I saw made me believe, suddenly, in heavenly intervention.

"Look!" I yelled, and pointed to

the roof.

They all looked in the direction of my pointing finger. It was Wright who saw the reason for my broad grin. The smoke was spreading in layers through the cavern. And the topmost layer was coiling around a particular section of the roof. There was a vent there and the smoke was escaping.

The spot was high up along the wall. It wasn't very large. Only about two feet across, its darkness blended with that of the roof rock, which was the reason for our not noticing it. But how to get to it? The cavern roof was all of twenty feet high. And the walls were almost perpendicular. However, not far from the hole in the roof was a thick sliver of rock that stuck out horizontally from the wall. A tall man . . .

"Look," I said to the leader of the archers, "I want you to shoot"—I stopped then. There was something missing that could upset the whole plan. I looked around, almost frantically, before I spotted it. Just a piece of rope. And grass rope at that, I saw it to be when they brought it to me. But if it was strong enough for the work of mining, it was going to be strong enough for my purpose.

"Here," I said, handing the rope to the archer. "Tie it around an arrow and shoot it over that rock."

In a few seconds we had a rope ladder that led almost to the roof. I went up it, hand over hand until I stood erect on the rock. Then by stretching full length along the wall, I was just able to reach the opening. Then I was through.

It was just a cave. But I could see a faint glimmer of light at one end. That could wait. The important thing right now was to get the rest of the men up here. Ter was the first one up. Then with his assistance, we hauled another up. Then only Gorma remained.

His voice came up to us:

"What of Jomat?"

Wright answered for me:

"Tie the rope around him and we'll haul him up."

This guy that we pulled up, I'd never seen. He was tied up in a harness. Wright explained:

"If we leave him down there, he'll tell how we escaped. This way he may be of some value to us. As a hostage, perhaps."

Wright was nobody's fool.

Then Gorma swung up beside us and we started for that pinpoint of light. It was a cave! And the sight of the night with a heaven full of stars was the grandest thing I'd ever seen.

We were in a valley of some sort. I almost felt as though I'd seen this before. How else was I to explain my saying:

"Over that way lies a highway."

Wright gave me the oddest look. I could understand. Even the way I'd expressed myself was not the way I usually talk.

But as Wright had said to me: "These things can wait." Sword in hand, I started up the side of the hill confronting us. It was just as I had said. There, at the base of the hill was a broad highway, smooth as concrete.

The night was dark; only the stars gave us light as we trudged along, our footsteps silent in the Rog-hide sandals we wore.\*

**I**T FELT good to be free, even though

I knew that this condition was probably only an illusion in this world ruled by the metal-shod fist of Conly. I looked back at the file of silent men

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\*As will be explained later, it was evident that at this point, Corbett was beginning to merge with the personality of Rid, the outlaw. So that the reader will not be confused, there will be in later parts of the story this inability of Corbett to understand.—THE ED.

behind me. Two of Horlat's archers carried the bound weight of Jomat. Ter, who had been talking to Wright, now came up beside me.

"Free again, eh Rid," he said. There was a peculiar tone in his voice. A tone that disturbed me.

"Something wrong?" I asked.

"N-no," he hesitated over the word. Then continued, "You feel all right, don't you, Rid?"

"Of course," I answered somewhat testily. "Why shouldn't I be?"

"Oh . . . I guess it's all right then."

He was silent for a while, then:

"Does this place look familiar to you?"

"I'm not sure." My eyes swept the tree lined road. "I think we came out somewhere beyond the walls of Conly's city. I only hope that the direction we are taking is the right one."

"What do you mean?" asked Wright, coming up to join us.

"Who can tell in this infernal darkness," I said lightly, "whether we are not walking straight into a patrol?"

Wright was silent for a while then said:

"Where do you intend going?"

It wasn't the easiest question to answer. I had made a vow by the twin suns that gave us light, that I would not rest till Conly and his gang of butchers were driven from the land. But that was a long time ago and when there had been those who had the courage to oppose him. But the priests had too strong a grip. And someone had spoken too loudly of my plans. Conly had heard of the army I had raised and of my intention. We were a thousand against the score thousand of Conly's minions. And the trap they laid, beyond Isha's walls was well-conceived.

We walked blindly into it. The ancient stone highway led between the forest, and their hames were concealed

from our eyes. Only a few of us were mounted, the rest on foot. More, they had archers concealed within the tree tops. And so there swept over us a hail of arrows and when the archers were done with their sport the mounted men came sweeping down on us. There were only a few who escaped.

But now I was free again. And from Muna's Pit. Perhaps my star of destiny was still in the ascendancy?

"I know a spot," I said. "If we can reach it, we will be safe for a while. Long enough for Gorma to collect his men. Perhaps Horlat, too, can find some who have a score to settle with Conly? As for myself, the forest is deep and I know it well. There must be some, on this earthen globe, who are freedom's men. And will fight for freedom's cause."

The glimmer of starlight on Wright's face heightened the pensive look in his eyes.

". . . This broad highway. How came it here? They say, 'it was told, that once, in the long ago,' Hearsay beyond hearsay. *It was told, that once, in the long ago.* You see how we have lost track of what the Ancients knew?"

Again the silence came between us. I felt his curiosity as if it was a solid thing.

"Look!" my hand made a sweeping gesture over the stone road. "See how it is made. Smooth and level as my hand. Nor can one see the interstices where the blocks have been joined. A wondrous thing. But what do they tell us, these men who have the remembrance of things past? They speak of the great cities that stretched across the land. Of the huge buildings that reached spires to the very sky. Of the wondrous space ships that flew like the birds, unfettered, nor was there boundary in their flight.

"And how do I know these things?

How do any of us know? Who is there left among us to remind us of our past glories? The few artisans in my city, Isha. The poor roadside scribe, who scratches with metal stylus on a clay tablet. The teacher, like my father, who had nothing to teach?"

WRIGHT cleared his throat, as if he had intention of saying something. But when he held his peace, I continued:

"I suppose you wonder how I, an outlaw, with a price on my head came to have knowledge of all this? My father, may his soul know the peace of eternal rest, told all this to me. Aye and more. So my heart burned with the desire to make men free. To try to make again, the world we once knew here."

"Tell me, Rid," Wright asked, when I had talked my way to silence. "What of yourself? Have you no family? Wife?"

I laughed aloud. And Wright winced at the sound. For in it was the pent-up hate I felt for Conly—no, for Coll.

"No!" I have none to worry for. My mother died when I was young. And I knew only my father. Wife, you ask? To raise children for the Priests to use. Or to grow to manhood and know slavery in Conly's mines. Are you a stranger here that you ask these foolish questions?"

I realized, then, I had but asked the question that lay at the back of my mind. Who was this man, who parried my questions with the words, "later, I will tell you." Well, it was later, now and there was no time like the present.

But his curiosity had not reached its end.

"And you, Ter. Why are you silent?" he asked.

"When Rid speaks thusly, there is no need for others to talk. He speaks for all of us, then."

Gorma joined us. He laid hold of my arm and said:

"Let us hold up here, Rid. The men are tired, besides it's risky, this running about in the dark."

He was right. Although I knew where we were, there was no need for pushing our luck too far. I gave the command and, like wisps of smoke, we melted into the shadows. The thick forest hid us well. Then, while the men bedded for the night, I asked Wright to sit with me for a while.

"And you," I began, "how came you here?"

His face was a dim shape in the darkness. But I could make out the smile that made play around his lips.

"Mine," he began, "is a strange story. And, perhaps to you an unbelievable one. For I am a person from another world! Perhaps these Ancients you mention, had knowledge of what I am going to tell you. I'm sure there will be many questions you will want to ask, before I am done. If so, hold them, for I don't know the answers.

"I said I'm from another world. I should have said, another dimension. For there is no one here who can see this world from which I came. Nor can I see it.

"That world is not very different from yours, in shape. But, where here you have twin suns about which this planet spins, ours has but a single one. You spoke of there being huge cities with immense buildings. So are our cities constructed. We, too, use ships that fly through space. And in our lands there is the chance given to all, to learn the arts that might please them."

HIS words bemused me. That such a land could exist was beyond my comprehension. Where freedom existed. And men could . . .

"... and so," he continued, "I went away." It was evident I had missed a part of his story. But he was too engrossed in it to notice my momentary lack of attention.

"I went," he said, "to the state of Pennsylvania. Why, there, I do not know. I was driving east and possibly I was taken by the region. I found sanctuary in a small town, hid among the hills of that part of the state. One day I went for a stroll. And because of that stroll I took on that autumn day, I am here.

"For I met a man, fishing by a wayside stream, who changed the whole pattern of my life. His name was Richard Shaver! There is something about a man fishing that makes one pause, then sit by the fisherman. I was like the rest. I sat.

"He was a stocky man, broad-shouldered, with large well-shaped hands. The hands of a doctor or artist. His clothes were the clothes of a laborer, rough but clean. Then I noticed a peculiar thing. His line held no hook. An odd way to fish!

"An eccentric, I thought, and started to get up. And as though he had read my mind, he said, 'I find that I am able to think better in these surroundings.' My mouth fell open in astonishment. What manner of man was this! 'There is so much to think about,' he went on, 'and in the city there are so many to distract.' I admit I had to grin. The wayside philosopher!

"Tell me," he said, his eyes dark in inner thought and his face soberly regarding mine. 'Are you a thinking man? Do the wonders of this world puzzle you, as they puzzle me?'

"I don't remember the exact words I used but they led him to continue, 'then I feel free to talk.'"

Wright paused, as if to gather his thoughts, or perhaps to find the proper

words he wanted to use. Then, satisfied, he went on:

"Most of what he said won't make sense to you, because they didn't make sense to me. But there were some things that made me pause, gave me a perception of things that had not been quite clear to me before. Understand me, Rid, on earth I was a scientist. A physicist. And of great renown. And here was this backwoodsman, this person, who from his speech, had little formal schooling, opening up to me a vista of things undreamed.

"We sat and talked all the rest of that afternoon. And when night came we went back to his room in the village and continued our talk, until the sun, slanting through the windows, reminded us that we were hungry. And that we had talked through the whole of a night.

"It was an unforgettable experience! Much of what he said, I could not fathom. For example, that he was a mutation, that is, a manufactured man. Further, that his real name was Mutan Mion. And that he lived in Lemuria, many thousands of years ago. However, I was a physicist, not an anthropologist, so his claim to an ancient heritage was something I could not disprove. Nor his claim to racial memory. Although Jung believed in it.

"No, it was in his assertion that all matter was in a process of being integrated or disintegrated that gave me pause. In his assertion that gravity was not what we had been led to believe, that made me wonder if, perhaps, there was something to his, what I called mental vaporizing.

"Then I looked into my mind and came to a sinister conclusion. I say sinister. For the greater part of my mature life, I had followed the paths of scientific endeavor. And here, when all my mental faculties had, shall we say,



become stabilized, I was presented with something, which, if true, knocked all the science I knew in a cocked hat.

"NOW, you must understand this, Rid. That the science we knew was predicated from various hypotheses, or more simply, theories. For example, a man named Newton, had a fruit fall upon his head, while he was living beneath a tree. He speculated upon why the fruit *fell*. Why didn't it hang in the air? So was born one of the theories. That of the attraction of masses, or gravity. But Shaver said, 'why didn't he carry it one step further and ask if the fruit was not *pushed* down?'"

"In other words, Rid, I asked myself, if these theories are wrong, then the conclusions are wrong. Believe me, I was in a state of mental exhaustion, when I left him that morning. I did not see him again. For that very afternoon, I started back to Chicago. For two weeks, I was in a fury of movement. I back-tracked on every possibility that we had discussed and in every case found that there were questions staring me in the face which begged to be answered. It was too much for me.

"So I went to a friend, a fellow scientist, Allan James. I told him all that happened to me on that momentous day. Now James was carrying on an experiment in the field of relativity, in particular, with the relation of time and space. Something I said struck a chord in his mind. My excitement was a small thing, compared to his, when I made that statement. It seemed that Shaver had answered the one problem whose answer had eluded James.

"Well, Rid, you can imagine our elation. But there was a third party who had to be notified, a man named Davis. Davis was collaborating with James and of course it was the proper

thing to do. . ."

Wright stopped in his narrative and leaned against the bole of a tree. I waited with ill-concealed impatience for him to continue. But he just sat there lost in some inner thought. I prodded him:

"So what happened then?"

He made a peculiar sound deep in his throat. Then said, in a voice that was oddly tired:

"Davis was a genius. He made the whole thing fall into a pattern that was amazing in its simplicity. In three days, Rid, Davis presented us with the solution to the paradox, can a life be lived simultaneously on two different spheres at the same time?"

"He claimed it could!"

I was bewildered. Not only at what he had said about his being from another world, a world that was unseen by us, but that I, Rid, was living another life simultaneously with this. I just couldn't conceive of it. Foolishly, I asked, "and was his claim so?"

"I am here," he replied. "And so is Davis. And so are a few others."

A yawn suddenly escaped me and I became conscious that a new day had come to life. The blue of night was making way for the golden haze of morning. And that meant we had to be on the move. If Wright had any more to tell, it would have to wait.

I arose, stretching cramped muscles. Too, I became aware of a hunger sensation. And realized that I had not partaken of food in almost two days. Figures were beginning to stir and come to life. I called Horlat to my side.

"Send a couple of your men out to see if they can get some game," I said.

HE TURNED and I noticed that he, himself, went out with two others. He was going to make sure that game was brought back. While they were

gone, I set others to the task of acting as sentries, and as outposts to make certain that we would not be surprised. Ter and another built a small fire, in preparation for the game Horlat was bringing. Nor had we long to wait. Three fine young Parkas were the result of their hunt.

"What now?" asked Gorma, wiping his lips with his hairy forearm.

I called the outposts in and after they too had eaten, I told my plan. Horlat and his men were to seek recruits from the villages near his home. Ter, also, was to go back to Ishta and gather the remnants of my ill-timed revolt. Gorma, Wright and I would go into hiding, temporary but for the moment, necessary. Those who wished, could cast their lot with us.

Josa, Gorma's brother, raised the only objection:

"Conly," he said, "will know soon, if not already, that we have escaped. And reason that the first thing you will do, is attempt to return to those villages from whence you came."

"Quite true," I answered. "But there are not many who are leaving. And these will go in round about routes, seeking shelter in those places where men hold hate of Conly. They will not betray them."

He thought it over for a moment, his youthful face already showing the signs of the torture he went through in Muna's Pit.

"And what of us, who remain with you?"

I looked toward Gorma, his brawny figure almost bursting from the war harness, his bearded face grim in the thought of Conly's treachery.

I could almost read his mind. Gorma was an outlaw chief, the son of an outlaw chief. Never had he sworn fealty to any one. Yet he had joined Conly. Whatever the reason, it had to do with

Josa, for I still remembered his cry on seeing him fighting the guards. Now he was thirsting for Conly's blood! Good! He was going to get his chance.

"I have thought of that," I answered. "Gorma."

"Yes," he said.

"I think I know how you feel. And so, to you goes the most difficult task."

He questioned me with his eyes.

"How many men can you get in Porta?"

He grunted softly. "Most of the palace guard. And several hundred besides. But how am I to get them? Or rather, what good will it do. Conly would have me thrown into the lowest depths of Muna's Pit."

I grinned into his face.

"Give me your sword," I said.

He handed it to me wonderingly.

"Hold still," I said. And slashed downward with it across his chest.

He leaped back, bellowing in pain. Blood welled redly from the cut and rolled down the broad chest. The rest looked at me as if thinking I had suddenly lost my senses. Before Gorma recovered from the surprise at what I'd done, I said:

"And now you look more in keeping with the story you are going to tell Conly."

**H**E STRAIGHTENED from the crouch, which he had gone into, preparatory to leaping at me and asked: "What story?"

"That you were taken prisoner, but escaped. That wound I gave you will bear out your story."

He grinned broadly, then. Walking up to me, he gave me a terrific clout across my shoulders, bellowing as he did so:

"By Japet's beard! Now I know we will succeed! Rid, you have the mind of a priest. But I was stupid! Coll

escaped while I was still a prisoner. And we have the only man left who can say otherwise . . ." He looked meaningly at Jomat, still bound hand and foot. Jomat threw him a baleful glare and spat out:

"You'll rot, Gorma. Conly will pin your ears to the city walls."

"If he finds out, eh, Jomat? But you won't tell, will you?"

Jomat glared his hate but remained silent to the jibe.

As much as I enjoyed the situation, there was no time to be wasted. I kneeled on the ground and called them about me. With a pointed branch, I drew a map of our position on the ground. I thought, the night before, that the place looked familiar. Now in the light from our twin suns, I was positive. I pointed out to Horlat, Ter and Gorma the exact route he had to take.

Then, after they had left, I started out with the rest. But first, we secured Jomat to a tree, in spite of his plea not to. It seemed, according to Jomat, the forest was full of wild animals who were only waiting for us to leave so they could get at him.

"He would be too much trouble to us," I explained to Wright as we started off.

"Then why didn't you kill him?" he asked.

"I don't know," I said shrugging off his question.

We hadn't gone far, when Wright stopped, turned and started back, saying:

"My sword! I've forgotten it!"

I saw then that he had. He returned in a moment wearing it. Then, as we walked through the dense brush I told him my intention.

"I know a tiller of soil," I began. "Whose place is not far from Porta's walls. Were you ever in Conly's city,

Wright?"

"Yes."

"Then you must know that there are three entrances to the city. Two are guarded at all times. But the third is used by the traders who drive their herds through it. And of course when the animals come through, it is only natural for the herders to follow."

His face lit up when I had done speaking. He had already envisioned my plan. For he said:

"I understand. These friends of yours will give us the clothes of the herders. And who would suspect the lowly herdsman of having plans for the downfall of Conly?"

## CHAPTER VII

TOR MORT had as fine a herd of milk giving fertels as was to be found in all the land. The land he tilled was rich. And half of what he grew and raised went to Conly and the priests. Tor had never spoken out against this extortion. But one day Coll accompanied the collector and saw Tor's only daughter. And when Coll left, the girl rode behind him on the hame's back, an unwilling captive.

Tor's two sons lay dead, in the crimson pools of their blood. And Tor had only one hand, the left, for daring to raise the other against Coll. And the *whole of the herd of fertels and all of his crops* went to Conly that day.

Tor never forgot.

Nor did I! He had been my father's friend and his two sons and I had grown to a great friendship. Many were the days I had spent on Tor's farm. Shayda, Tor's daughter, was as much a part of our play as were the boys.

I had heard of the outrage while I was in Isha. And now, I suddenly realized why I had made the vow I did. It was because of Shayda! Her beauty

was as the sunlight and her sweet nature made me forget the harshness of existence under the tyranny of Conly.

These were my thoughts as we walked the forest. The darkness would come twice before we came to Tor's. And now, as we marched in wary manner, ever on the watch for the enemy, I found that the figure of Shayda came to me, as a disembodied person, steeling my heart against the fears of a possible failure.

This time there would be no mistake, however. Those who had gone out were going to work in the utmost secrecy. And the response to their appeal, judging by the number who came out in the open, when I called, should be much greater.

I had chosen paths least likely to have wayward guards on patrol. The two days passed without incident. Wright, I noticed, seemed to be under a growing tension, as we came closer to Tor's. I couldn't understand why. But I gave it only passing thought. For in Josa, I had found a man of interesting qualities.

"How was it you came to earn the enmity of Conly?" I asked.

He walked along, beside me, a tall man, broad-shouldered and loose jointed, with a chiseled brooding face. I knew he was younger than Gorma, yet there seemed years between them that Gorma had to reach.

"It began," he said, "only recently. We were outlaws and as such lived beyond the laws of Conly. Our prey were the wealthy *citizens* who made caravan trail to the large cities. I don't have to tell you how these men get their goods. But, since it is the way of life here, we were acting in our true light.

"Then, not so long ago, Conly sent an emissary to us. It seemed he had something on his mind that needed *our* attendance. Gorma," he smiled in sud-

den affection and I was reminded again of the strong bond between these brothers, "thought I, being as he said, the more intelligent of us, should attend.

"Rid," he suddenly demanded, "have you noticed that Conly became a tyrant in the true sense of the word, only in recent times?"

His question startled me. Then I realized the truth of what he said.

"Yes," I said.

"And have you ever wondered at it?"

I confessed that I hadn't.

"Then what I am going to say will interest you. I arrived at the palace and was immediately conducted to the throne room. There were assembled all of Conly's chiefs. Coll, Jomat, Hafa and several others whom I did not know. One in particular, Davis . . ."

I started violently.

". . . What's wrong, Rid? Do you know this Davis?"

"No. But only yesterday, Wright told me . . ." I let my voice trail off. There was no use in telling Josa of what Wright had said. I felt sure that he would not believe.

"He told you what?"

". . . Nothing. Go on, Josa. What happened?"

HE WENT on after a moment, "Davis seemed to act as a sort of adviser to Conly. For often, during the talk that went on, he would whisper into Conly's ear and Conly would shake his head, as if in agreement.

"But to relate what took place there. It was there, that the plan to conquer all this globe was born. And I think it was all born in the brain of this Davis.

"At any rate, Conly proposed that our men join them. Essentially, Rid, we are warriors. And I will say this for Conly. He can be persuasive when he has to be. His offer was generous in the extreme. I accepted. And went

back to Gorma. Soon after, Conly had acquired a force of three thousand men to augment the army he already had.

"You know what happened then."

I nodded soberly. War had come to plague us. But it was of short duration. Conly's army swept like a forest fire through the opposition. In less time than it takes to tell, they had conquered all. And . . .

". . . And," Josa said, as if in continuation of my thoughts, "then came the unmasking." He laughed in bitterness, as though he felt the personal guilt of his having been a party to the whole affair. "Conly had either gone mad, or was swollen with ego. *He was going to conquer whole universes!* I know it, Rid! It was that devil, Davis, who put that mad thought in Conly's head.

"It was then, Conly made his mad proposal. The conquered people were to be *slaves*, working in Muna's Pit, mining the earth for a devilish mineral which was to make Conly's mad dream come true!"

He paused, obviously trying to bring his emotion under control. Then he continued:

"That was when Conly became the tyrant. He sent his minions out to pillage and burn if the people did not come willingly. Then it was that the Priests revived the ancient custom of blood sacrifice. And preached in the temples, compliance to Conly's will. I did a foolish thing then. Gorma had been sent out on some mission or other; and I realize now, that it was simply to get rid of him. For I had spoken out against what was going on. They felt that I was no longer needed. So I was clapped into the Pit, with the rest of those who had resisted. Gorma told me the excuse they gave for my absence, on his return. I had been sent to the furthest city as an administra-

tor."

How strange was fate, I thought. Chance had befought all of us, the persecuted, together. What I couldn't understand, was why Conly had not sentenced us to death. Perhaps, as Coll had suggested, we would provide sport before our execution? Now the scandal was on the other foot. Maybe it was Conly and his, who would provide the sport? That is, if our presence at Tor's wasn't discovered.

I led them to Tor's as if I were an animal scenting my way home.

His farm was bounded on one side by the forest, the very forest through which I was leading the men. Tor's home had been burned to the ground. So he had built a new one, close to the forest. I think he had it in mind, that such a situation might arise. And that whoever would come would appreciate the fact that there was little ground that was open to observation, which he had to cross.

Cautiously, I peered through the dense undergrowth. There was no one to be seen, not even a man working in the field. Then, motioning the rest to follow, I hastened to the rude, thatched hut that was Tor's home.

On the far horizon, twin balls of flame were dipping into the earth. Night would soon be here. And through one of the windows, the gleam of fire showed that Tor was there. I slid up to the door and opening it, stepped softly within.

A HALF dozen men, dressed in the robes of herdsmen, turned and gave me silent scrutiny. Then one arose, stepped away from the table and approached me. It was Tor, thinner than when I had seen him last, his body more stooped, beard greyer, but there was no mistaking those eyes, black as night, soul-searching as always. My father

had called them the eyes of a man who sees only God and God's handiwork. He stood before me, silent, searching my face for something, then, in the formal manner I knew so well, said:

"Thou art Rid, son of my dearest friend, Mote. I am deeply honored. Come sit with us, thou and thy friends."

I was not conscious that I answered in the same formal vein:

"I thank thee, Tor, friend of my father, for thy welcome and for my friends' welcome."

Then as we grouped ourselves about the table, Tor said, this time in a more casual tone:

"Fear not! These are *my* friends. It is true what the wind has told us?"

"And what has the wind said?"

"That Rid became outlaw . . . and was brought to bay?"

"The wind lied. But had it whispered—rebel . . ."

The six men in the cloaks nodded solemnly. Tor said:

"The wind is right only when it brings rain."

I heard Josa, beside me, chuckle. But we were here for a purpose. And I meant to find out if Tor would do anything besides talk. Again the formal manner of speech:

"Friend of my father, I have come to thee in my moment of need."

Tor's reply was simple—and to the point:

"Ask! And it shall be given!"

I released my breath slowly. I knew Tor would not fail me!

"Good! Then here is why we came to you. We, and some who are elsewhere, escaped from Muna's Pit. We are going back into Conly's city to carry to the proper end, what I began. We need your help."

"In what way?" Tor asked.

I told him what I had in mind to do. Tor ran fingers through the grizzled

beard. His herdsman's cloak fell away from one shoulder, revealing the stump of his right hand. It brought home to me, the debt he owed to Conly. The faint shadows of doubts I entertained were dispelled at the sight. This man would give us aid until the end, no matter how bitter it would be.

As though they felt this was the moment of decision, my men gathered close about me. When I had done, there was an interval of silence, a moment of judgment. Then Tor said softly:

"Be at peace, son of my friend. We are with thee. How long is your plan to stay?"

"Well," I began, figuring the time it would take for those I had sent out to accomplish their missions, "it depends on several things. How long it will take Gorma to gather his men, whether Ter and Horlat will make the number of converts I hope . . . I cannot say with certainty."

TOR walked back and forth in thought. Then, speaking in a low voice, as if in continuation of my thoughts, he said:

"Let me see . . . the herds will not be ready for the market for a few days yet. Of course you cannot go into the city wearing the garments you have on now. Luckily, the tax collectors have made their call. So there will be no one other than ourselves who know you are here. I think I can manage to scrape up enough clothes for all of you. And when you are done helping with the herd, there will be enough dust on your persons for an effective disguise. Aye! I think we can manage."

I looked around, when he had done. Broad grins lighted the features of some of the men. Josa's eyes were bright in satisfaction at how well things had turned out. I suspected that he had been not too enthusiastic about my plan

of action. But now he was all for it. Oddly enough, it was Wright who brought up a point of dissension:

"But won't they suspect when they see the large number of men helping you?"

I had not given his story any further thought but now something clicked in my mind. I whirled on him, demanding:

"You lied! Your whole story was a fabrication. For how is it you speak our tongue so well?"

He retreated from my anger. Dismay was writ large in his eyes, as he saw the suddenly hostile glances sent in his direction. None there but I knew what we were talking about. But the very calling of that harsh name, by me, made taut their already tensed nerves. They crowded him close to the wall. I saw several hands reach for swords. In a few seconds, unless someone interfered, blood would be shed. My sense of fair play came to Wright's rescue.

"Hold!" I commanded. In a way it was a test, to see if the men accepted my authority. They did.

"Wait! Let him have his say."

Wright licked dry lips. Then in a voice hoarse with emotion, said:

"Rid! You must believe what I told you. When we see Davis, *he* will corroborate what I said." Then, as if that was all he could say, he shouldered his way through the men and walking to the table, sat down.

I looked at him and had to admire his courage. He had shown little fear, even when they had made as though to attack. There had been dismay in his eyes. But not fear. I thought, what harm can he do, even if he proves to be an enemy? He is alone.

"Very well," I said. "I will let matters stand as they are, for the present."

He nodded, as if satisfied with my decision. The men, now that it was settled, moved back to the table and

waited for further developments. Tor went to a small chest near a wall and opening it, pulled from its depths several cloaks. And from hooks on the wall, took several more. These he passed around. When he had done, only Josa and myself were not swathed in the voluminous folds of the cloaks. Tor gave his to Josa, while one of the herds-men gave me his. It was decided that, for that night, we would sleep in the field.

THE next morning, Tor and two of his men showed us where the ferts were grazing. We were all given hames on which to ride. And taught how to herd. It was new to me. But to most of the others it was an old story. So for the next few days, I was a herdsman, sweating among the animals, separating the young, driving the males into the enclosure Tor had built for them. Mine had been an outdoor life but this was new to me. I reveled in it.

Yet always before me was a sweet face, pensive, soft lips curving in a smile. Shayda. I wondered where she was, and if any harm had befallen her? But that thought was quickly erased from my mind. How could anyone, looking into those eyes, filled with innocence, do aught to harm her?

On the third morning, after our arrival, Tor called called us together.

"The time has come," he said. "The herd is ready. And we will drive it to the market place."

Josa's eyes glistened in anticipation of action, at last.

"And something else, Rid," Tor continued. "My men want to join with you. More, I know many of those who will be there. I feel sure of some, who . . ."

I knew what he meant. Good! We could use them.

We were off, in a cloud of dust and

bellowing sound. The herd seemed to know our destination and gave voice to their displeasure. But in my heart was a song. In a few moments, we were enveloped in a cloud of dust and there was no one who could say that we were not herders from our appearance. Sweat-covered, bearded, we would have passed for herdsmen, even without the cloaks we wore and the hames we rode and the fertels we drove before us.

The afternoon was dying, when we arrived before the market gate and the Musa was giving call to the faithful. It reminded me of another afternoon, not long since, but the circumstances were different this time. We were not the first, nor would we be the last. For behind us, came the sound of other approaching herds. Good. Then we would not be given too close an examination by the guards. I was right in my thought. We passed through the gate and into the market place.

Here, all seemed confusion. Shouting men, bellowing animals, merchants come to bargain, farmers come to sell, all these created a welter of sound that was distracting. And moving among these, were swaggering guards and warriors, shouldering merchants and farmers aside, as if they were the scum of the earth.

We squatted on our heels and watched the throng. Tor came and hunkered down beside me.

He looked unworried, as he said, in casual tones:

"I like it not, these guards and warriors."

I spat on the ground and acted as unconcerned as he.

"Why?" I asked. "Is it unusual?"

"Aye! I wonder . . ."

" . . . No," I answered on reflection.

"Not even Gorma knew of this. Perhaps it is just a new idea of Conley's."

"Perhaps. But I shall make inquir-

ies. Wait on my return."

He arose and sauntered to a shop close by. Josa, who had been an interested listener to our talk, looked questioningly at me. I shrugged my shoulders. We would have to wait Tor's return, before we could know.

Suddenly, Josa went stiff. His eyes were intent on a broad-shouldered palace guard, who had stopped to look in a shop window.

"Danger?" I asked, tersely.

"No," he said, eyes still intent on the guard. "He is a Captain. Gorma made him."

"Loyal?"

"I'm sure. And now I know how we can get word to Gorma."

HE AROSE and shuffled off in the direction of the guard. The guard turned from his inspection of the window and started off just as Josa came up. Josa's shoulder struck him a glancing blow, throwing him off balance. For a second, the two were in close contact, then after Josa said something, the guard struck him a blow with the side of his palm and as Josa staggered back, laughed and walked on.

Josa, his face scowling, returned and squatted beside me.

"Then he wasn't friendly," I said, from the corner of my mouth.

"So we fooled even you," he replied.

I gaped in astonishment. "But . . ."

He laughed lightly behind his folded arms. "Gorma will know of our arrival. And will be expecting us."

Tor came up just then. He squatted beside us, silently.

"None know," he said. "But they all wonder. The market place has never been under surveillance before. We shall have to be careful."

I considered what he said and came to a sudden decision. Something was up and I was almost certain it had to



do with us. I looked toward Conly's palace on its eminence, the Temple of The Great God beside it and a plan was suddenly born to me.

"This captain. You know where to find him?"

"Yes. He heads the outer patrol."

"Days?"

"Nights."

"Good. Tonight, we will see him. And Gorma, also."

"What is in your mind, Rid?" he asked.

"Tonight, I will tell you. In the meantime, pass the word to your men, Tor, to wait my return. And you Josa, tell our men the same."

### CHAPTER VIII

**WE STOLE** through the silent, dark streets, hiding in the shadows at the approach of anyone. There were none who questioned our furtive manner. Then we were on the approaches to the palace.

Here it was necessary to be on watch. Josa knew, from past experience, that the approaches were well guarded. We had discarded our sweaty cloaks and were again in the harness of warriors. We had planned, in the event that we were questioned, to assume the identity of guards.

My plan was simple. We were to become palace guards also. It should prove to be not hard, what with Gorma and even better, this captain, who would not be suspect, if he gave us work, say in the arsenal. Then we were at the appointed gate. Two men stood at watch before it.

We stepped calmly up to them and Josa said:

"Will you call Captain Dort?"

"Who are you?" asked one, suspicion high in his voice.

Josa drew himself up stiffly.

"Never mind that," he said, his voice brittle in command. "Do as I say!"

I saw the man cringe, as if Josa had struck him. Drawing his sword, he rapped with its hilt on the barred gate. Immediately there was an answer:

"Who calls?"

"It is I, Mor Coma. Open. There are two here who want to see Captain Dort."

The gate drew upward with squealing of its metal, protesting against this unusual demand. Three men appeared before us. I saw by their harness that they were not palace guards but members of Gorma's band. Luckily for us, the darkness hid our faces. For certainly one of them would have recognized Josa. And spoken his name.

"Follow us," said the leader of the three.

They turned and started down the gloomy path. Torches, set in the walls, gave off a smoky, flickering light. Our guides marched ahead, nor did they see if we followed. I whispered to Josa:

"Why are we going down?"

"The quarters of the guards is underground."

The torches burned with an uneven flame. The tunnel was dank and smelled as if it had a charnel use. We made several turnings and I saw, at these turnings, several metal cages.

"For prisoners who have not been sentenced yet," Josa explained. "And who sometimes are forgotten."

So that was the smell. Death was a frequent visitor here. But now our guides were at their quarters. A wide, high door barred our path.

"Stay without," their leader commanded.

In a moment Captain Dort appeared. He was the same man whom Josa had jostled in the market place. He started with surprise when he saw who his visitors were. But he regained his com-

posure quickly and, curtly invited us in.

THERE were a half dozen men in the room we entered. I saw several look at Josa with surprise. They recognized him. But their discipline was of the highest, for beyond that first start, they gave no sign that there was anything out of the ordinary taking place. That one of their leaders, a man who had been supposedly sent to a far city, was making a clandestine meeting with their commander.

Dort dismissed his men and sat down at a rude bench. The last man had barely passed from the room and he was on his feet, and at our side, pumping Josa's hand with enthusiasm. I felt a thrill at the sight. Such fealty was hard to find. And it was sincere.

"Here," Dort said. "Sit with me and tell me what has brought you here. And why the clothes of the herdsman, I saw you in, this evening?"

"My friend," said Josa smiling gently into the other's face, "I will tell you. But later, when we have the time. Right now, however, time is something vital to us."

There was no hesitation in Dort's reply:

"Ask what you will. I grant it."

"Good! I bring you several new recruits."

Dort's eyebrows lifted.

Josa went on, "They are friends of mine."

The other's face cleared.

"Do not be surprised at their appearance. For they are herdsmen. There will be eight of them. And I want them placed on duty in the armory. And by the way Dort," he went on in afterthought, "my friend, Rid here, remarked the number of guards in the market place today. Something wrong?"

I discovered I was holding my breath, waiting his reply.

Dort passed his hand across his chin, stroking it carefully, as if he'd just shaved:

"Odd, that you should bring that point up, Josa. But it is a fact, that in the last few days, there has been a, well, a peculiar feeling in the air. A feeling of distrust. For example, the guards at the outer gate are now from the palace. And always they have been our men. More, the priests have suddenly taken to sticking their long noses into our affairs. They appear at the strangest places and at the strangest times."

"How do you mean?" I asked, taking over the conversation.

"Why—they even come here. Although I make short work of their visit. Still . . . and something else, now that I think of it. I do not pretend to know all of us. But lately I'll swear that our band has increased considerably."

I turned to Josa. "Then we must strike quickly," I said.

"Yes!" he answered tersely. Dort was regarding us, wide-eyed.

Josa said, "Can you get to Gorma tonight?"

Dort replied, "I think so."

"Then hasten. But first give your men orders that Rid is to be admitted with the men he will bring."

It took but a moment and I was on my way to Tor and his friends in the market place. The sleeping city seemed to hold menace as I slipped through the dark streets. Now and then I passed shops which erupted men. And for some reason, I found myself seeking the shelter of darkened doorways. The market place seemed an endless distance from me. But at last I came to the inn where Thor and his men were quartered. They were awake, as I had instructed them to await my return.

THEY saw by the paleness of my face that there was something amiss.

"Is there anything wrong?" Tor asked.

"I don't know. But we can't wait for the rest," I said. "Despatch two men to find Horlat and Ter. They must get here as quickly as possible. And the rest of you, follow me."

This time, I took one of the men's cloaks. It hid the gleam of my armour. We were almost there, before I noticed the absence of Wright. I had been too engrossed to notice that he was not with us.

"Why," said Tor, "I remember! He slipped out just after you and Josa left." He shrugged his shoulders. "I did not think it strange at the time. But now—well, why did he go and where is he?"

I could not think of that now. The important thing was to get to Josa. We arrived at the gate. And found it unguarded. I should have known better than to have entered as blindly as I did. It almost cost me my life. For, just as I stepped into the darkened passageway, a sword tore through the thin fabric of the cloak I wore. I don't know how he missed. But I didn't! And even as I thrust at the dim shape before me, my voice rose in warning:

"Arms! A trap, men!"

We were a sharp wedge that drove through the opposition, as if they were phantoms opposing us and not men. For a moment they were brave and fought back. Then they melted from before us and ran for their miserable lives.

We made for the guard room at a run. And even as we made the last turn, we heard the clash of arms. There they were, backed up against the wall, fighting savagely against ten times their number. Screaming at the top of our

lungs, we drove in to attack.

Perhaps it was the ferocity of our attack. Or the sheer surprise of it but they turned at our onslaught and ran too, as had those we met at the gate.

Josa wiped blood from a cut on his face and panted:

"By Japet's heart! You came in time!"

"What happened?" I asked.

"Soon after you left one of the priests came, accompanied by a gate guard. He wanted to know who the strangers were, who had come, seeking Dort. Dort explained that we were recruits. The explanation seemed to satisfy the priest, for he left. Then just a while ago, there came a pounding at the door and a demand that we open up in the name of Conly. I knew then, that our story had not been believed."

Dort, his sword dripping blood, said: "Time passes. What now?"

I thought quickly. We were faced with a double dilemma. One; now that the alarm was raised, they would be on the lookout for us. Two; if we retreated, we might run into their waiting arms. On the other hand, if we could reach Gorma and he could organize resistance, then we had a chance.

"To Gorma," I said without hesitation.

WORDS held at the ready, wary for the sound of pursuers, our bodies crouched low, we moved stealthily forward. The tunnel swept upward. We passed more cages and my horrified eyes saw the remains of human bones. Our sandaled feet made no sound on the stone of the tunnel floor.

"Hist!" Dort whispered.

We halted at his warning. I heard a sound, low, then louder, more distinct. The sound of shouting men. The screams of those who have received mortal wounds. And it came from a

room just ahead.

"The barracks!" Dort whispered in horrified accents.

Without a further word, I leaped forward. The door was closed but not bolted. We swept into the room and into the midst of a furious battle. In the center, I could see the towering figure of Gorma, swinging his sword with reckless abandon, a smile on his face.

In a moment I had hacked my way to his side.

"How," I said, parrying a wild swing, "did this happen?"

Gorma's sword cleaved a man from shoulder to chest, as he replied, "They knew all. We were led on."

We were too occupied for the next few seconds to carry on. Then we cleared a way around us and he went on:

"They came a while ago, shouting we were the last of the lot and that I was to be . . . take that!" he shouted thrusting his sword deep into a priest's belly. The priest held tightly to the sharp edges as the sword was withdrawn and as it came out, Gorma twisted it sharply. A length of bloody intestine followed the sword, through the gaping wound. The priest went to his knees, his hands clasped about his middle, as if that way he could hold back his insides.

"Taken alive," Gorma concluded.

Suddenly, I was possessed by a blind rage.

"Damn them!" I screamed. "Conly! I've got to get him!"

"Come on then," said Gorma. And moved toward a far door.

They fell away from our determined advance. Then we were through and in the corridor of the palace itself.

"This way," Gorma commanded and started straight up the corridor. Behind us came the remnants of our men. I was glad to see Tor and Josa among them.

But behind us, where there should have been pursuit, there was no one.

We burst into an open passageway. It too was deserted. Up the passageway we flew, as though possessed, and then we were in that long center aisle which ended before the throne of Conly. Then I understood why we had not been opposed. They had waited until we were in a position from which there was no retreat.

They poured in on us from every side. Priests, whose robes were covered with a protecting armor, warriors and the refuse which had attached itself to Conly. They were a flood in which we were engulfed.

Well, I had come to see Conly. And ahead, half the distance of the palace, I could see the gross figure of the man on his throne. My sword was a whirling blade of destruction, tearing its way to its goal. Behind and beside me, fighting with all the desperate fury of the damned, were the handful of guards and herders.

We fought to the very steps of the throne. And behind us the dead lay in heaps. But now we were a paltry few against the thousand or so who hemmed us in.

A voice, Coll's, shouted a command: "Alive! Take them alive!"

**WE FOUGHT** with desperation but they with fanaticism. It was not possible to win out. They climbed over the heap of dead around us until we could no longer find room to swing our swords. Then we were buried beneath screaming men, men who in their victory were like animals, screeching and clawing to get at us.

They dragged us to our feet and brought us before Conly. The gross face hung forward, chin pressed against chest. The heavy-lidded eyes were closed. I could feel their baleful glitter,

from behind the fleshy lids. Coll, a savage, gloating smile on his evil face nudged the figure on the throne.

It toppled forward and rolled to the floor, almost at my feet. The hilt of a knife stuck straight up out of the back. Conly had been murdered!

Stupefied, I looked at the body. For a few seconds, there was silence. Then came, from the throats of those about us the expressions of horror and grief. And the cries of revenge. But I was deaf to all this. A new figure had appeared on the scene. Someone who had slipped up to Coll, standing there by the throne, and had whispered a message to him that made the man straighten up as if he had been struck with an arrow.

The man who had done the whispering—was Wright!

"Hold!" Coll cried in a great voice. "Bring them up before me!"

Savage hands pulled mine behind my back. Fists lashed my face as I was dragged up before Coll. Some there were who spit upon us.

Coll, his face radiating the hate he felt, stood on wide thrust legs, his hands clasped behind him.

"Now bring the other out," he commanded.

And from behind the curtain spread back of the throne, Jomat appeared, dragging with him the resisting figure of the man called, Davis.

I knew now how they had learned of our plans. Wright had not forgotten his sword. He had left it behind, purposely! So that he could have an excuse to return—and set Jomat free. But why, I asked myself!

And now another mystery. Davis, a prisoner, like ourselves. Again, why? Then I remembered our hopeless situation and grinned, mirthlessly. What need was there for speculation? We were all dead men.

Jomat, now that he had the upper hand, was no longer the groveling coward, begging for his life. With a curse, he pushed the man down the short flight of stairs. Davis stumbled and rolled all the way down, coming to rest at our feet. I saw then, that his feet and hands had been bound.

I felt Josa's body tremble in helpless fury.

"We should have killed him," he muttered.

"Too late for that," I replied.

Coll heard me and his eyes buried themselves in the puffy bags of their lids. The curving nostrils distended in the beaked nose, as he said in a voice heard throughout the palace:

"Here they are, before us. The murderers of our chieftain. The rebels who would try to prevent our destiny. We are the *Chosen People*! From the very lips of the great God Japet, came the command . . . the *universes* shall be your field of battle. Go and conquer in my name."

Shrieks of delight were torn from the throats of those surrounding us, at these words.

"It was given to Conly to lead us."

Again the shrieks.

"But there were those who conspired against him. They murdered him! But they are ours now, to do with as we will!"

"Kill them!" came the shouts.

He breathed in gusty breaths, reveling in the power he had acquired with Conly's death.

I LOOKED about me in the few seconds before he answered the cries of his followers. Where were the several thousand men who belonged to Gorma? Surely these few who had fought for us were not all that were left? Also, where were the rest of Coll's men? A premonition of doom came to life for me:

Coll pulled the many thonged lash from the belt about his middle. Then he stepped down from the dais and walked before us, as if he were on parade. There was no need for him to worry. We were hemmed in on all sides by his men and there was not one of us who did not feel the sharp point of a sword at his back. No, there was no need for Coll to be afraid.

I was proud to see that there was no one who did not look him straight in the eyes as he passed. But my heart felt a small quaver of fear, as I saw the malevolent look in his eyes. There was something in his mind that bode ill for us. Then he saw Tor.

"You!" he exclaimed. Then he laughed. "So you didn't forget, eh? So you came to keep the promise you made me. That my loss will be double that of yours? But I have no daughter, old man."

"But you have two arms," came the soft reply.

Coll replied to that as I knew he would. With the lash. Each stroke he gave Tor burned into my soul. If I gave my life to it, Coll would pay double. He stopped only when Tor lay before him, unconscious. Then he stepped away from the tortured body and said:

"Death? No! They must be made to suffer, first!"

The mob answered, "Aye!"

"To the cages, then, till I decide how to punish them."

One of us was made to carry Davis, while the rest of us were shoved, pulled and pushed back to those cages we passed on the way up. The barred doors closed on us with the sound of doom. Then, after a moment, Tor's still unconscious body was flung into our cage.

I looked around and was amazed at the fewness of our number. Twenty men left of the . . . of the what? I

still did not know what had happened to the rest.

"Gorma," I lashed at him, savagely. "What happened? Where are the rest of your men?"

He grunted and said, "What men? Every move I made was known. My men were suddenly sent off to various cities. And those who were left were sent off to parts of the palace where they were beyond my control."

"Blame Jomat," Davis said, unexpectedly.

"What do you know of this?" I demanded. "And now that you are here, who and what are you?"

"I," came the startling words, "am the man responsible for all this."

I stepped away from him in wonder.

"Why are you surprised?" he asked, speaking directly to me. "You know me."

"I—I know you?"

"Certainly! That day you were taken prisoner, you called me by name."

"Why, I've never seen—wait," I remembered what Wright had told me. Then it was true, what he had told me. And now I was going to find out the whole truth, if I had to beat it out of his very hide. "Is it true, that you are from another world?"

It was the first many of them had heard of what Wright claimed. They gaped in open-mouthed astonishment at the two of us.

We had stripped the bonds from his legs and arms. He gave me a piercing glance from his grayish colored eyes, then said:

"Let me talk to you alone, first."

The rest moved away from us, at his words.

"All right," I said. "Explain."

"As a matter of fact you should be the one to do that," he said with a smile. "Because you knew me and I didn't know you. Don't you remember

that day?"

I shook my head. Of course I remembered. But what was he referring to?

"You were knocked out," he said. "And when you regained consciousness, the first words you said were, 'Connaly, Davis and Cella. I've found,' then you stopped."

So it was the truth, what Wright had told me. But if it was so, then who was I now? The man from the planet of Davis or Rid, the prisoner of Coll? To say I was bewildered was to put it mildly. Davis noticed my air of bewilderment. He looked at me, startled.

I told him then, the gist of what Wright had told me.

He let his breath out in a long sigh at the conclusion of the tale.

"Of course," he said, "Wright told just the story I'd expect him to. Wright, the arch-charlatan. The man who took the honors which did not rightfully belong to him."

"What do you mean?"

"James was the man to whom the honors should have gone. It was he who—but that does not concern us. What matters, is that Wright is mad. And that he has joined his madness with that of Coll. They plan on an expedition, the basis of which is a wrong assumption."

"What do you mean?"

"I TOLD you that I was responsible for these men being here. Here is how that came to be. Wright came to James with his story of Shaver's theory. It made clear to me something that had been puzzling me for a long time. The theory of the fourth dimension and the possibility of such things as space faults. Now I saw that space and time were interrelated. And I proved it by bringing my body into this world. Into a world, unseen and unsuspected.

It was only fair that Wright and James should share in my experiment."

"This man James. What happened to him?" I asked.

Davis shook his head sadly. "I don't know," he said. "Nor do I know what happened to Anders and Phillips. I can only speculate and that would be useless, for I can't even assume a reasonable theory."

"How did you and the rest get here?" I asked.

"Through a space and time fault."

"All right! All right!" I said irritably. "I've heard all that before. Tell me your part in this."

"Yes," came a low voice. "Tell us your part in all this."

It was Josa. And beside him was Gorma and Dort. And all around us were the men who had suffered because of Davis coming into our world. There was something ominous in the way they stared at him.

"I came here alone, first. I found myself in a forest of some kind. I had provided myself with weapons, not knowing what to expect in this world. That I was in another world, I had no doubt. Where I was accustomed to seeing a single sun, two now blazed. Then I saw my first human and knew that this place was inhabited by people who were as we on our world. And I saw too, that the people of this world were in a primitive state of existence.

"There was no need to look for more at that time. So I went back."

"How?" asked Gorma.

"The same way I'd come," Davis replied.

It was not an answer calculated to inspire confidence. And I said so.

"Of what use would be to tell you the means?" Davis said. "The way back is gone."

"Gone?"

"Yes. That is, as far as we're con-

cerned. When I heard you call my name, that day, I knew that, somehow, you had discovered the entrance. I told Conly. And he razed the hut to the ground. But—he and Coll knew the spot on which it stood. So that when the time came for their plan to be put into action, they knew exactly where to go.”

A picture had been forming in my mind, as Davis spoke and by the time he was through, the picture was complete. I knew the spot, also.

“Go on,” I said.

“As I said, I went back and told James and Wright of what I’d found. Then I returned, this time with the others. That is, with Wright. James—he shrugged his shoulders. The details of how we met Conly will take too long in the telling. Suffice to say, he was interested in our story and believed us.

“Yes, the Conly of that time, was a different person than what he came to be after James made his great discovery.”

He paused for breath and there was a silence until he continued:

“As Wright told you, I was interested in a certain scientific theory. Well, I’d proved my hypothesis. Now James was to prove his. The experiment he was carrying on at the time, had to do with a new element he was sure he had found.”

“Do you mind if I ask some questions?” Josa interrupted.

“Later!” Davis said tersely.

I was surprised to see Josa take the rebuff gracefully.

“Conly showed us the wonders of this world. And the first place we went to was Muna’s Pit. And when James saw the Borium deposit, he went wild. There was the proof of his contention.”

“Wright mentioned a man named Shaver, didn’t he?” he asked, suddenly.

I nodded.

“Who and what Shaver is, I can’t say. But that in his talk with Wright he had answered some questions that had been bothering us, there is no doubt. Shaver had a theory on the integration and disintegration of energy which he called, ‘energy-d and energy-t.’ As I recall, Shaver’s opinion was that all mass was in a process of movement. Nothing new to that. But he went further. He claimed that all this was a radio-activised movement and was a result of emanations from the sun.

“That the earth was being constantly bombarded with these rays of solid content. And that the main constituents of these rays was radium. More, that radium was a harmful element. It killed by accelerating age in man. In fact, in everything that lived. Shaver’s theory bore out what James was working on.

“And when Conly showed us the Borium deposit, I knew that they were both right. For Borium is pure radium, yet, something else, too. For it is used as armor, here. And that would be impossible with pure radium.”

**I THOUGHT:** How these people love to talk. Wright; now this one. And they talk in circles, saying things which none can prove or disprove.

“Well, here we were on this new world. But the old was better, we thought. For we had made greater progress there. Then we were introduced to the high priest, Hae Tu. And in the Temple, to which he brought us, we were shown the wisdom of the ancients, as he called it. There we learned how the Borium was worked so that no harm came to those wearing it. We were shown the writings of these people.

“Here,” Davis said in sudden dramatic tones, “on this planet are forces,



which if put to use, are the most destructive known. We, on earth, are only now, disintegrating the atom. It was an old story to the ancients. And even greater things they knew. We were scientists. Their formulas were easy to read. Given the proper equipment, we could manufacture these things. But we needed organization.

"It was Wright who conceived the great plan. To bring to this planet, those men.

"What motivates men? What emotions are there, to which we can appeal? Greed, hate, love, the desire to power. On earth there were those who could be approached.

"We found them. It was not hard."

He sighed deeply, then. Then went on:

"I should have known better. I knew Wright. And what sort of man he was. You see," he explained softly, "Wright is mad."

"Mad!" I exclaimed. "I cannot believe that."

"But he is, though," Davis said. And there was that in his voice that made me believe. "He is mad, with the madness from which there is no escape. He has delusions of grandeur. He wants to be the ruler of these universes they plan to conquer."

"Then how," Josa interrupted again, "was it that Wright was imprisoned . . ."

"I know," Davis broke in, "what you are going to ask." His features showed the irritation he felt. "And I will relate how that came to be, in due course.

"He volunteered to go back and recruit the men we needed. I let him go, not knowing that what he had in mind, was not what I had. Of course we knew that some of these men, even if they accepted the proposition, might not be able to come through the fault.

*"Only two came through, Connally*

*and Cella!*

"Then Wright showed his true colors. It was he who instigated the war that you have passed through. It was he who enslaved the people. Through Conly.

"But as I said, Wright is mad. And before long, he was attempting to tell Conly how to go about it."

"Wait one moment!" Josa said in astonishment. "Am I right in thinking that Conly and Coll are these two who came from this other world?"

"You are right," Davis said. "How it is, I don't know. What strange process was involved, how it was that these two found themselves in the bodies of Coll and Conly, is beyond me. Or why neither Wright nor I had doubles. Rid, here found a body. Or why it was that James and the rest who simply disappeared, did so. I had a theory. But the physical proof was something that knocked my theory into a cocked hat. I can't explain it!"

A voice bawled, "never mind that. Go on."

Davis nodded somewhat grimly and continued:

"That was Wright's first mistake, making an enemy of Conly. His second, was in attempting to gain Coll's sponsorship. Coll was no fool. He told Conly of what Wright was trying to do. Conly immediately threw Wright into the Pit. But that did not alter the plan Wright had given Conly for conquest. As I said before, the ancients had these formulas for the manufacture of weapons. And I could decipher them. H'm," he went on, more to himself, than to us, "now isn't that strange? They used the same symbols we do.

"Sorry," he apologized. "Anyway, not even the priests knew whether I was right or not. So I simply delayed my findings and told them it was going to take longer that I had thought.

"I was succeeding in my plan when Jomat appeared and from that day, Coll no longer seemed to trust me. This morning I found out why. There was a plot afoot to overthrow Conly. And some of the roots were in the palace itself. And Coll had the idea that I was part of that plot.

"Then early this evening, Wright appeared. There was an air of repressed excitement in the air. Coll and Jomat got into a huddle with Wright and . . . well, you know the result of that huddle."

**Y**ES, we knew, all right. Not that it was going to do us any good. We were doomed. It was only a question of time. Odd, that the pieces to the puzzle should fall into place now that it was too late.

"Then it was Coll who was responsible for the murder of Conly," said Josa.

"Yes," Davis said. Then in a voice loud in passion, "but they are fools. Believing Wright."

"Why?" I asked.

"He told Coll that he can find the fault. I know he can't! Even I no longer can find it. Conly saw to that."

"Then what is his purpose?"

"To make these machines and invade the planets of your system."

There was a deep silence at the conclusion of his talk, a silence that was broken by the sound of marching men. Coll had come to a decision about us. The corridor filled up with armed men. The dungeon door swung wide and Jomat appeared on the threshold.

"You will step out into the corridor, one at a time," he commanded.

There was nothing to do but obey. And as we stepped out, our arms were made secure by the guards who, two to a man, held us pinioned in their grasp.

Jomat gave a command and we were

marched back to the palace hall. Coll not sat on the throne which had been Conly's. Wright stood beside him. Coll's eyes bored into each of ours in turn. Then he said:

"This is to be your judgment. You are all to be sent to Muna's Pit. It seems that when some of you were there last, a fire was started by my guards to prevent your escape. That fire is still burning. It is only fair that since you are responsible for it, you shall have the work of putting it out."

An evil grin creased his lips. There was something behind those words which spelled danger for us, something that brought shouts of laughter from the assembled guards.

"There is no water in the Pit," I said. "How are we to fight this fire?" I asked.

"That," he said, each word like a stroke from his whip, "will by your worry. And to make sure that there will be no escape this time, all the exits will be sealed. Including the one you used to escape."

I felt my breath come and go, slow and shallow. Coll had us. We looked at each other. And in all their eyes was the same thought, better to die fighting, than the slow, torturing death Coll had ordained for us. Then I looked at Coll and saw that he was hoping that we would make the break. Already, his men had their weapons out. In a second, the slaughter would begin.

I had to do what I did. Turn and start for the corridor which led to the Pit. For a few seconds, I walked alone. Then Josa joined me. And Gorma. And then Tor, his face still streaked with the red welts of the whip came after us. The rest followed.

**T**HEY herded us before them, as if we were ferals. I had not noticed that the guards were provided with

whips. And they used them on us. They were merciless in their driving. The lash bit at each of us in turn. There was no escape from it. Each step was bound by those who had come to share in the thrill of whipping the helpless.

Our procession came to a halt at the end of the corridor. We stood before a huge door. I noticed the looks of expectancy on the faces of our guards. And when the great door swung open, I saw the reason for those looks. A thrill of horror shot through me. And I knew, now, what that look on Coll's face meant.

Led by the high priest, Tol, a long file of priests came marching into the room. Immediately behind Tol, there came a file of ten girls, whose arms were bound with chains. And the first whom I saw, was Shayda. The raven night of her hair was bound in a braid, lending to her face a maturity beyond her years. Her face was pale with the paleness that comes with the acceptance of a horror that cannot be escaped. But her head was held high. I turned and searched out Coll. He too, was looking at her. And in his eyes was to be found the reason for *her* being here. I did not need to be told. Coll had been repulsed. And in revenge, had given her to the priests.

I knew what this procession was about. It was the day of the blood sacrifice. The day when ten virgins were offered up to the God, Japet, as a blood offering to appease the blood-thirsty God. So Coll was to know full vengeance. And I was as helpless to do anything about it, as was the fertel, ready for the slaughter.

We weren't permitted to watch long. Quickly, for they did not take the chance that we might make a last effort to fight our way out, we were herded into a branch of that corridor. And swiftly brought down to the first level

of our prison. The smell of smoke was strong in our nostrils, here. The cavern-like room was emptied of humans. Our coming had been expected, for a select group of guards were waiting for us. And placed along the walls, were others, armed with bow and arrow. And far enough away, to be out of our reach, should we make a break for freedom.

Then, from another entrance, there came a number of slaves bearing the mortar and bricks for their work. As soon as these appeared, we were hustled on to several waiting dump cars. Then, with a car filled with guards preceding us and with another bringing up the rear, we were sent down to the second level. And to another level, The Pillow.

Above there had been only the odor of smoke. Here there was the flame itself. At the far wall was a sea of flame. And beyond, where the fight had taken place, there was a furnace-glow of leaping fire. Even at our end the heat was so intense, it scorched our clothes and made us throw our hands up before our eyes. Then the guards left us.

Dimly to our ears, came the sound of masons at work. The tunnel was being sealed.

I saw Davis sniffing at the air.

"What, now?" I asked incuriously. Nothing mattered. But it is the way of humans to talk, even when there is no need for it.

"By all that's holy," he said in a voice that held incredulity. "Shaver was right. That's carbon burning."

HE BURST into wild laughter. I thought he had gone mad from the shock of seeing the flames.

"Oh Lord," he gasped, controlling his laughter. "And Coll sent us down here to put out the fire."

"It can be done," I said angrily. "If there was only water. And perhaps we don't even need water. All . . ."

"... But then the last laugh will be on Wright," Davis continued. He chuckled softly but I noticed that in his eyes there was no laughter. "Hell," he muttered in savage tones, "the whole planet's on fire!"

"That's carbon, the stuff coal is . . . wait," a glow came into his eyes. "Maybe," he continued in reflective tones, "I've been too engrossed in Shaver's theories. Believing that planets are made of the particles of sun matter. Perhaps this is only carbon? Only a strata of coal?"

"Is that good?" I demanded excitedly.

"No," he answered. It was as if he hadn't heard me but was still deep in some thoughts beyond the business at hand.

I turned in disgust from him and joined the group at the far end of the pit. Here was Tor, Gorma, Dort and the remnants of his band. Josa remained with Davis.

"What did he say?" Gorma asked.

I dismissed the question with a shrug.

"Then this is the end?" Tor queried.

I bit my lips. How to answer that?

"Well," I said hesitantly, "I don't know. Of course if you men want to just lie down and wait for the flame to reach you, well, there isn't anything I can do about it. But . . ."

"Yes?" came the voices of several.

"The rest can do what they will!" I said in a voice filled with passion. "But for me, I will continue to fight until there is nothing left of me to fight with."

"Well spoken, Rid," Davis said from over my shoulder. "But just what do you intend to do about this situation?"

"We have no water," I said. "Unless there is an underground stream . . ."

I looked around to see if anyone knew of such a thing. They shook their heads negatively.

"... Then we must shovel dirt on the flames. I know . . ."

"What will we use for tools?" someone asked.

It was then we realized the full treacherous way of Coll. He had all the tools removed from the pit, before our arrival. He was going to be certain there wasn't going to be any escape, this time.

"Don't feel too badly," Davis said. "It would have been impossible to have put this fire out, even with water. I know of a coal fire in the state of Ohio that has, sorry, I was back in the good old U. S. A. for a second. Anyway, even with shovels, what good would that do? You'd only be adding fuel to the flame."

I got his meaning. The fire was being fed from the same source that we would have used to smother it.

"Wait," came a shrill, excited voice. And a small, pale man burst into the circle formed by Davis, Josa, Gorma, Tor, Dort and myself. The little man was quivering in repressed excitement.

"Wait!" he said again. "I think I have the answer."

"Who are you?" I asked.

"He is one of the few priests, who had enough courage to break with Tol," Gorma said.

"Go on," I said, regarding him with the respect due him. It was a greater courage to break with the religion which has been one's for a lifetime, than to merely rebel as people usually do.

"I remember," he began, "that once I was serving Tol, and someone asked him if there was any way from Muna's Pit."

He paused dramatically.

**WE** WAITED with bated breath for what Tol had said, in answer to the question.

"There is, through the temple. Tol

explained that there is a tunnel connecting the temple and the Pit. And the entrance is beyond the great sacrificial stone."

"But how do we find it?" I wanted to know.

He smiled broadly.

"I too was curious. One night when all was still and it was safe to investigate, I looked. And found it. A great block of stone set in a pivot arrangement, was the means of ingress. More, not just satisfied with finding the tunnel, I followed it for its entire length."

"Then you can lead us to it?"

"Of—of . . ." His shoulders sagged in sudden hopelessness.

"What's wrong?" I asked in alarm.

"It is in there," he said pointing to the wall of flame that was the other room.

My mind went numb. It was almost too much.

"Quick, man," Davis said, taking the lead when he saw how the priest's words affected me." Tell me, where is this entrance?"

"It is high along one wall. A series of shallow steps lead down to the floor. But it is located at the far wall."

"Here," said Davis and I found his tone of decision infectious, "some of you men get back in the tunnel and roll one of those cars in here."

They returned in a moment rolling the car on the rails.

"All right," Davis said on their return. "Here's our plan of action. I won't say we'll succeed. But we can give it a try. All of us will get in the car and don't forget to get down as low as possible, and we'll roll the car into . . ."

"Not into that furnace!" someone said in horrified tones.

"What's the difference where we roast?" Josa asked.

They laughed at that and I knew

that they had been won over.

"There's only one possibility that there will be a failure. If the tracks have melted."

"They can't have!" I shouted. "They're made of Borium."

We crouched low in the car and six men gave it momentum. Slowly, it began to roll. I stuck my head up for one last look, then we were in the sea of flames. They crackled above our heads, sending out sparks that fell among us. The heat was almost unbearable. And as we went further into the inferno, it got worse. The car slowed up, then stopped altogether.

We were all gasping for breath. The smoke made us choke and cough. My smarting eyes took in the scene. Flame from ceiling to floor. This was madness. But the sort of madness that was bound to succeed.

"There," said the ex-priest, pointing to the wall ahead. "There are the steps. And above is the rock."

Small tongues of flame licked at the steps. But the rock itself seemed immune to the fire.

"It's not rock," the little man explained, as if he had read my thoughts. "It was made so, to look like the rest. It's Borium."

That explained its immunity to the flame. But how to get to that door? And having gotten there, how to open that massive gate?

And again Davis had the answer.

"The ledge of the car," he said. "It's a short jump to the top step from here. You go first," he commanded the priest. "and Gorma and Rid next. Between the three of you, you should manage to get the door open."

We followed his direction without the slightest hesitation. There was just room enough for us to maneuver up there. Gorma let out a yelp of pain, as his hand touched the surface of the

door.

"Here," said the priest, inserting his fingers in a narrow crack in the Borium.

**I** THRUST my fingers in beside his. I could almost feel them blister from the heat.

"Pull!" he moaned. "Quickly! Before it gets too hot to handle."

Then Gorma's fingers were alongside mine and soundlessly, under the pull of our hands, the door swung back. And one by one, they piled through the opening. Quickly, the door was slammed shut.

Here in the tunnel, all was darkness. Ahead, I heard the voice of the priest:

"Follow me." Then there was the sound of metal striking metal. The priest had taken off the belt from his harness and was tapping the wall with it, giving us the direction.

I felt the slope of the tunnel, as we walked along. We were moving upward. It wasn't far. The sound of his tapping stopped. I bumped into someone.

Then I heard Davis say:

"Is this it?"

There was a whispered reply that I didn't make out. Then the sound of grunts, and finally a squeaking sound. Then light streamed down on us.

We started up, Davis in the lead, and stopped as abruptly as we had begun. For there had come to our ears, the chant of the priests. The temple was occupied. They had only lifted the pivot block part way up. So they started to lower it, when the priest called to them to stop.

I saw him, his head bent in an attitude of attention. Then he whispered to us, the reason for the chant:

"The sacrifice to the God Japet, is now to be consumated."

The chant grew louder, wilder. Again he listened.

"The virgins are being led to the altar," he announced.

*The virgins were being led to the altar.*

His words seared themselves into my brain. I guess I went a little mad, then. For with a hoarse, inarticulate cry, I leaped past the men at the stone and, heaving at it, shouldered it upward. Then I ran up the two steps which led into the temple. I was deaf to the shouted warning of Davis and the others. I had only a single thought in mind. That is if I was capable of thought then.

Before me, was a priest, still dressed as warrior. He was facing toward the front of the temple. I could not see beyond him, for I was on a lower level. But neither could anyone see me. He never knew what took him by the throat. And he died without sound.

I took his sword and moved into the spot on which he stood, for I had noticed that he had been standing in an attitude which told me he was peeking at something that was going on. I pushed the dead man aside with my foot and glued my eyes to the aperture through which he was peeking when I arrived on the scene.

Behind me, I heard the rustle of sandals on the stone floor. They had followed me and were standing behind me, watching me. But I was only conscious of their presence through their proximity. All my senses were centered on what my eyes were seeing through the hole in the stone.

Before me, I could see the whole vast area of the temple. Larger than the palace, it was also of different shape. Semi-circular in shape, it had no roof. Above, the stars blazed down on the barbaric scene. In the exact center was a huge slab of stone supported on four pillars of polished, gleaming Borium. The altar.

The stone and its pillars rested on a sort of dais, set on a series of steps which ran all around the altar. To one side, the priests were gathered. And ranged along one wall, were the men whom we had fought to exterminate. Coll, Jomat, Wright and the rest.

**STANDING** at the side of the altar was Tol, his back toward me. It was he who had done the chanting we had heard.

Then, from between two pillars at the end of the temple, there came the file of virgins, each led by two priests, dressed in the ceremonial robes of purple and white. The girls were no longer bound. And they, too, were in keeping with the occasion. The God, Japet, was not only blood-thirsty, he was sensual. The girls were nude, but for the sheerest coverings on their breasts and around their waists.

Now the other priests took up the chant. As though it was a signal, Tol turned and, facing me, cried out in a loud voice:

"O mighty Japet! They are here, in their glory! They wait for the sign of your favor! Mighty Japet! Give us that sign! Are these gentle virgins to find favor in thine eyes?"

I had cowered down, instinctively, when Tol had so abruptly turned in my direction, even though he couldn't see me. Suddenly, I was thrust from the stone and the little ex-priest had his mouth at the aperture.

"They do," he said in a low voice.

And the words were echoed in an awe-inspiring roar, from the front of the stone.

I reached down to pull him away from the opening, and he turned and gestured me to silence. There was something in his manner, which said louder than words, "Not yet."

As if the words were those expected,

Tol turned again to the altar and motioned for the first priests to bring their charge before him. And I saw who it was.

Shayda!

Her head was still held high, but I could see the paleness of her features. With an imperceptible gesture, she shrugged off the restraining arms and walked with courageous step to the altar. The priests scrambled after her. I could see the pout on Tol's lips, at her sudden movement. It was evident, she had not acted as was the custom.

The priests seized her arms once more and the three stood silent before Tol.

"The Great God has given us the sign of his pleasure," Tol intoned. "He has found favor in our enterprise. Let the first sacrifice be prepared!"

Again the little man pushed me from the aperture and placed his mouth to it.

"Aiee!" came the words from the stone. "Let the first sacrifice be prepared!"

I looked again and saw the priests tear the coverings from her form, revealing the virgin freshness of her beautiful body. A vast sigh of pleasure came from the assemblage. Then Tol sprinkled something over her and taking her by the hand, began a slow march toward us. The priests broke into a wild song, in accompaniment.

With Tol's first step, the others followed. So that in a little while, there were twenty of them on the stone above us. I saw then, the reason for his pushing me aside. For, knowing the ceremony, he had known that they would have to come here to complete it. And I knew too, what the stone really was, behind which we were hiding. It was a statue of Japet. And the aperture through which he had spoken, was a sort of mechanical device which magni-

fied the voice, leading the people to believe the God had spoken.

The little man motioned us to gather around him. In his eyes was the fervor of the fanatic, about to commit himself to either eternal damnation or know the fruits of righteous rebellion.

"It will take a little while, yet. So some of you move softly around one side and the rest will go around the other. Watch for my signal. Then move, but swiftly, in surprise."

I was the only one of us armed. Therefore I had to despatch my man quickly, so that the sword I had seen beneath the robes they wore could be snatched up for instant use.

I heard the low murmur of a voice from above, then the little man's arm swept downward and I was around the stone and up the three steps to the top.

SHAYDA was stretched full length on the lap of the God. Tol stood above her, a long curved, keen-bladed knife poised above the beautiful body. He took one, startled look at me, then turned and started down the steps. My sword sliced through the scrawny throat and beyond. His head rolled down the steps a few paces in advance of the body. Simultaneously, the rest of my companions attacked the priests. So sudden was our appearance, so swift and ferocious our attack, that before anyone could move from their positions, we had seized the arms we needed.

Then they came at us. Nor did we retreat. There was no place to go but back. And that would have been useless. We were committed to a line of action from which there was no turning. I took the lead. My song was a muted sound, lending rhythm to the thrusts of my sword.

This time it would be final! Do or die!

The priests had gone wild, with the slaying of their leader. And they made the mistake of thinking they were warriors. In so doing they impeded the actions of Coll's men. For the priests rushed us first. Their puny bodies were no match for the trained and strong men of Gorma's band. They literally melted before the swinging strokes of our swords. But they had the fanatic courage of men who had seen their temple defiled. Again and again, they came to the attack. And always with the same result. Their bodies piled up before us. But here and there, one of them managed to get through. Then one of my men met death. It was only a matter of time until by sheer weight of numbers, they would wear us down. Our only chance was to win through, to the outside.

All this time, Coll had been screaming to let his men get through to us. And finally, the remnants of the priests heeded his command. A path was opened for him. I exulted in the sight. For I had made up my mind that I would not die before I had sent him ahead of me. Blood dripped from a score of light cuts on my chest. I saw in the few seconds interval between attacks, that there was not a single one of us but who was not wounded. Even Davis had snatched a sword, the blade of which ran red.

In that interval, I assembled my men in a tight group around Shayda. Then, instead of waiting, we charged.

Ahead of us was a solid wall of guards. And now from behind, there came the rest of the priests. Twelve against several hundred. It was hopeless and we all knew it.

I could see it in the face of Coll, lips slaving, eyes slitted in anticipation of the impending slaughter. Beside him, Jomat, grinning from ear to ear, his Rog-ugly face red in the glory of his



lust.

Silence fell between us.

The only sounds were the rasp of sandals on the stone floor. The distance between us was now measured in feet. Slowly we moved to narrow the gap. Then Coll lifted his sword high, as a signal to charge.

And a hail of arrows fell among his men!

Then, from the entrance to the temple, there came the roar of hundreds of voices. And before I could think, Ter, at the head of a nonederscript army of men, came charging across the floor. And on the top of the temple walls, I saw the archers of Horlat, their deadly weapons spewing death.

Coll, his face distorted in a mad look, screamed:

"Kill! Kill these first!"

And he came at a run for me.

I parried his thrust and thrust him back with the hilt of my sword. Then, as he attacked again, I flicked lightly at his chest, drawing blood. I ducked below the wild swing of his sword and caught him to me with my free hand. Holding him close, I whispered:

"Not this time. We are one against one, now!"

THEN I pushed him back, and as he fell away from me, my sword drew blood once more. He squealed at the feel of the Borium tip. Then he went berserk! Disregarding my weapons, he came at me. I grinned broadly, exulting in my strength and side stepped his charge. Side stepped and slipped in a pool of blood. My hand, sword in its grasp, struck something and the weapon was torn from my grasp. Before I could twist out of the way, Coll was on me.

I lay on my back, helpless, and looked at him, poised with the sword grasped in both hands. He stood, legs

spread wide, the sword held high above him, the point held down and in his eyes the look which said; "I go. But you first."

Then his arms moved downward, too swiftly for mortal hand to stay.

And a barbed arrow stuck out, the length of a man's arm, from his throat. The sword fell from his nerveless fingers and he dropped, a leaden weight, upon me.

I pushed the corpse aside, with a feeling of repugnance. There was no need for me. Ter and his men had come at the right time. Coll's men had surrendered almost in a body. There was no escape, since he controlled the single entrance to the temple.

Jomat and Wright had been taken prisoners. Horlat had come down from his station atop the wall and he joined us at the center altar. I stood, an arm around Shayda, who had been given the robe of a priest to hide her nakedness. Facing me were Wright and the coward, Jomat.

Wright looked his defiance at me. There was a sneer on his lips.

"Well, Corbett," he said, "it looks like your search has come to an end."

Shayda looked her puzzlement at me.

"I will explain, later," I said in an aside to her.

"And so has yours," I replied, pointedly.

He shrugged his shoulders.

"What made you think you'd succeed?" Davis broke in.

"If you would have only left me alone!" Wright snarled. "But no! Your jealousy was too great. It was I who . . ."

"Is mad," Davis interjected. "Yes, it was you who had the delusions of grandeur. It was you, who all the time, knew that the real reason for our coming here was to give you the chance at this mad scheme of yours. It was

you who were responsible for the enslavement of these people. Did it ever occur to you that it would have been impossible to have sent all the men and machines through the fault. No! In that mad world in which you live there was only room for this single thought. That you were to be the supreme being, a sort of mad God. And do you see the result of that madness?"

He pointed to the corpses strewn about.

Jomat, eyes and mouth wide in avid listening, turned and regarded Wright. There was a peculiar expression on his face. Then with an inarticulate cry, he pulled a dagger from the wide belt that held his harness and, before anyone could even move to prevent him, he thrust it to the hilt in Wright's breast.

And leaping back, away from those who tried to prevent it, he pushed the dagger deep into his vitals.

As I reached him, he whispered.

"Should- have- done- it- long- before . . ."

THERE were six of us who rode into the forest. Ter, Davis, Josa, Gorma, Shayda and myself. Ten days had passed since the battle in the temple. Couriers had been dispatched to all the cities of our world, to tell the inhabitants that the end of Conly's had come. And that peace would now be known. Gorma and Josa had been installed as rulers. The little ex-priest was now the head of the temple.

The course of a large river had been turned aside and its waters had flooded the fire in Muna's Pit. All was at peace. Then Davis announced his intention of going back to his world, that is if he could find the fault. It was then that I

told him I thought I knew where it was.

The small glade looked familiar. The hut was gone. But I had noticed its location between two trees which were the only ones in that vicinity.

We dismounted and walked to the spot where I thought the hut stood. Shayda stood beside me. As I passed a certain spot, a wave of dizziness came over me. I shook it off and turned to speak to her. *And I knew that what Wright and Davis said was true.*

I was Reed Corbett. And standing here beside me was Davis and Rod Terry. My arm was around the most beautiful woman I had ever seen. She was looking at me with the oddest expression. Davis surmised what had happened.

"Corbett!" he exclaimed. "This is it!"

I looked past him, to the tree sheltered valley in which he stood. For the first time, I knew I was two personalities. I was Rid and Corbett. And this was Shayda, my beloved. These were my dearest friends. And this was the land I had freed. There was nothing back there in that land from which I'd come that could give me what these people could. I looked at Ter and knew it would be unfair to send him back. Back to being Rod Terry, gangster.

"I stay here," I said softly. "And Ter stays with me."

Davis smiled gently. He understood.

Then we took the stool we had brought with us and inserted the pointed end into the ground. Davis seated himself in it. And began to twist about.

And as he twisted, a strange thing took place. His body began to grow transparent.

In the end, there was only the stool.

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# PICTURED ROCKS



By **FRAN FERRIS**



**P**ICTURED rocks have had their place in history both scientifically and pseudo-scientifically. Early paintings found in the ancient caves have given good indication of the civilization found at the time and aided science to reconstruct and trace man's development through the ages. Fossils recovered resembling pictures have assisted immeasurably in discovering the age of the earth, its ancient wealth and possible prognosis of its future.

Pseudo-scientifically, pictured rocks have their place in the traditions of various peoples of the globe. An example of this is the pictured rock formation found in Austria. The practice of interpreting the shape of rocks and relating them to present situations of everyday life is very commonplace. One such formation is

found in the bluffs which surmount the middle eastern end of the Inn valley in Austria. For centuries the neighboring prognosticators have had their field days interpreting the shape of the rocks. Strangely enough, the inhabitants have attributed some of their fortunes and misfortunes to these rocks. So far as is known, the reading is given depending on how the light struck the rocks and the position of the observer. Claims are made which accurately predict the year's harvest, the general health of the community and their fortune. Most generally, it is believed by others, that the ingenuity of the observer and his imagination are the important qualifications for interpreting the pictured rocks.

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## PARALLELS TO THE DESTRUCTION OF ATLANTIS



By **H. R. STANTON**



**W**E HAVE records of numerous islands lifted above the water and others sinking beneath the waves, accompanied by earthquakes and storms similar to those which marked the destruction of Atlantis.

In 1783, Iceland was visited by tremendous convulsions. A month previous to the eruption on the mainland, a submarine volcano burst forth in the sea thirty miles from shore. The sea was covered with pumice for 150 miles. A new island with high cliffs was thrown up, but within a year it sunk beneath the sea, leaving a reef of rocks thirty fathoms under water. In 1831 a new island came up in the Mediterranean, near Sicily. It was called Graham's Island. It came up with an earthquake and a waterspout sixty feet high and eight hundred yards around. In a month the island was two hundred feet high and three miles in circumference. It soon sank beneath the sea.

The Canary Islands were probably a part of the original empire of Atlantis. In 1730 the earth split open on the island of Lancerota. A hill of ejected matter was thrown up, and in a few days another vent opened and gave out a lava stream which ran over several villages. Dead fish floated on the water after the lava had rolled into the sea. The cattle throughout the country dropped dead, suffocated by the putrid vapors, which condensed and fell down in drops. All this was accompanied by severe storms and these commotions lasted five years. The lava covered one third of the island.

In 1775 at the point of the European coast nearest to the site of Atlantis at Lisbon, the most tremendous earthquake of modern times occurred. The sound of thunder was heard underground, and immediately a violent shock threw down the greater part of the city. In six minutes, sixty thousand persons perished.

Many people had gathered for safety on a marble quay but it sank down with all the people on it and not one of them ever floated to the surface. Boats of people near it were swallowed up in the whirlpool. No fragments of these wrecks ever rose to the surface. Probably the center of the convulsion was in the bed of the Atlantis or near the buried island of Atlantis, and was a successor of the great earth throes which, thousands of years before, had brought destruction on that great land.

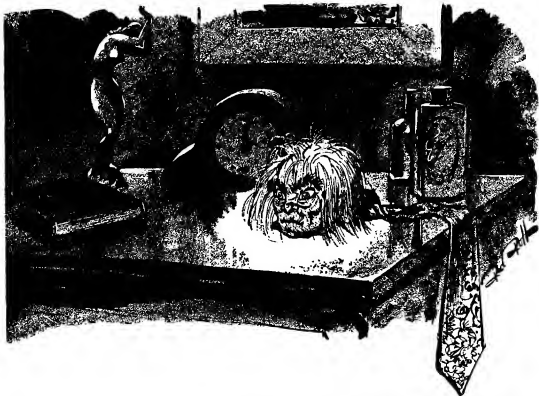
While we find Lisbon and Ireland, east of Atlantis, subjected to earthquakes, the West Indies have also had their share. In 1692 Jamaica suffered from an earthquake. The earth opened up and water poured out. Many people were swallowed up in these rents. The earth caught some of them in the middle and squeezed them to death; the heads of others only appeared above ground.

The facts would seem to show that great fires which destroyed Atlantis are still smoldering in the depths of the ocean; that the commotions which carried Plato's Atlantis into the sea, may again bring it, with all its buried treasures, up into the light.

# DEATH'S HEAD



A wave of horror swept over Burch as he stared at the grisly thing on top of his dresser . . .



**by Chester S. Geier**

**With the Amazon far behind him,  
Burch felt safe—until he saw the head . . .**

**N**INE of the emeralds were big ones, but even the smallest of the dozen or so others was considerably larger than a pea. Burch had them spread out on a box. He stared down at them, chin cupped in one thin hand, the deep seams of his sun-browned, narrow face drawn with dark thought.

Sale of the gems, he knew, would bring enough—just enough—to make real one of his fondest dreams. This was to start his own mining firm back in the States. He had the knowledge and the experience. All he lacked was sufficient funds. But the emeralds

would now remove that handicap—if he didn't split with Fallon.

The issue was clear, then. Fallon had to be put out of the way. Permanently.

A bird screeched in the jungle beyond the clearing. There was a faint chatter of answering monkeys.

Tense nerves within Burch responded automatically to the sounds. He turned sharply, guiltily, and stared at the tent opening.

He was still alone. Fallon hadn't returned. The red-headed, huge mining engineer evidently was still with Pedro.

Burch shuddered as he thought of the half-breed guide. Pedro had been

bitten by a poisonous snake that morning while on his way back from a check-up of the dugouts stored at the edge of the river. The sweltering, tangled jungle surrounding this narrow tributary of the mighty Amazon was filled with such dangers. Recalling Pedro's pain-contorted features, Burch's determination to return to the safety and comfort of the States hardened.

He told himself he'd return, all right. And with the emeralds. Somehow he'd take care of Fallon, so there would be no necessity to share. He needed, more than Fallon did, the money the emeralds would bring. The big, soft-hearted Irishman would merely squander his half in some foolish, sentimental way. He was always pulling some boy scout trick, like rescuing that native from the crocodiles or nursing a smelly, flea-ridden half-breed like Pedro.

Pale blue eyes slitted with new cunning, Burch returned the emeralds to their empty tobacco tin container and locked it away in his trunk. Fallon had entrusted him with the gems, but it wouldn't do for Fallon to know that he had been looking at them again. That would make the other suspicious. Fallon was easy-going and simple enough, yet Burch didn't intend to take chances.

Easing his spare, wiry frame back into the folding camp chair, Burch lighted a long, brown-paper cigarette. He exhaled smoke with a wiry expression of distaste. It would be good to get back to where he could buy American cigarettes. He could never grow used to these Brazilian products.

HE was lost in scheming thought, the cigarette an ash-tipped stub between his fingers, when Fallon strode into the tent. Removing his sun helmet, Fallon wiped his rough-hewn, square face with a damp handkerchief. A pale scar shaped like a half-moon, the relic

of an old mine accident, stood out high on one cheekbone. He wore laced boots, and his khaki shorts and short-sleeved khaki shirt were covered with dark blotches of perspiration. He looked at Burch and spoke slowly, almost tiredly. "Pedro's dead."

Burch pretended a quick sympathy. "That's too bad. But I had an idea it would happen. That snake bite looked plenty serious to me."

Fallon ran a big hand through his shock of bristling red hair and sighed. "I did the best I could. Sucked out the wound and fed Pedro whiskey. He was a good scout."

"Too bad," Burch said again. He felt a dark satisfaction. Pedro's death removed a secondary obstacle in the way of his plans. The guide had been attached to Fallon. And he had known about the emeralds. And he would have suspected Burch at once if anything happened to Fallon. Burch considered himself spared the trouble of having to silence the half-breed.

Lowering his bulk to the edge of a cot, Fallon produced a pipe and began to fill it with tobacco. "Lucky thing we got this far back to civilization before Pedro cashed in. We'll manage to get along by ourselves from here on. All we have to do is follow the river back down to the main stream. It'll be a cinch after that. We'll be able to pick up a river steamer within less than a week."

Burch thought of the Indian village a short distance upriver from the camp. "We could make the river traffic end of the main stream within a few days by hiring native paddlers. The tribe living near here seems friendly enough."

"I wouldn't trust them too far." Fallon lighted his pipe and blew a cloud of smoke. "They're headhunters, you know."

"I thought the government put a stop to that," Burch said.

Fallon shrugged. "In theory, yes. According to what Pedro told me some time back, though, a lot of it still goes on. The custom's too old to be stopped entirely. So old, in fact, that the Indians have their methods of preserving heads, by smoking and shrinking them, down to an exact science."

Fallon puffed contemplatively at his pipe a moment. "As a rule," he went on, "heads are collected only from other tribes. But Pedro said white men have been known to disappear in this country. The jungle might account for some of them, though it's a sure bet the Indians are responsible for the others. A white man's head is a real collector's item—too scarce and valuable to resist. The authorities can't prove anything. The Indians always seem to know when an investigation is on the way and hide all traces of their headhunting activities."

Replacing his sun helmet, Fallon stood up. "Pedro has to be buried, and it wouldn't be decent to put it off. Things go to pieces fast in this climate. I'm going to dig a grave back in the jungle where the Indians won't find it. They don't know about Pedro yet, and they won't know where to look when they do."

Burch made no offer to help. Fallon didn't seem to expect it. Waving his pipe, the big mining enginer went out.

**B**URCH watched from the tent opening as Fallon took a spade from the tool chest, and then, shouldering the blanket-wrapped body of the guide, strode off into the jungle.

Now that Fallon was no longer present, Burch released a grin of triumph. His problem had been solved. He knew how he was going to dispose of Fallon. It was a method that would require no risk on Burch's part. His hands would be clean.

Burch thought quickly. Fallon would be gone for some time. This was the ideal opportunity to put his plan into action.

He began moving with determined purpose. From his trunk he took a cardboard box filled with cheap jewelry. He had purchased this before he and Fallon had set out on their prospecting expedition into the interior, acting on the idea that the trinkets would prove useful in dealing with hostile or suspicious natives. It had been a wise move, he decided now. The jewelry would be a valuable aid in his scheme to remove Fallon.

He selected several of the more gaudy rings, bracelets, and bead necklaces, wrapping them in a handkerchief. He thrust this into a pocket of his whipcord breeches, then buckled on a revolver and donned his sun helmet. Finally, picking up a rifle, he left the tent.

Not far from the camp was a narrow path that led to the Indian village. Burch took the path, striding swiftly.

Pedro had been on amicable terms with the Indians. He'd had a fair understanding of their language, and had on several occasions acted as an interpreter. Thus, Burch knew the identities of the more important personages in the village. The one he intended to see on this trip was Maluka, the chief.

Burch considered himself a good judge of men, regardless of race. His confidence came from the knowledge that he had made few mistakes in the past. He felt certain that his guess regarding Maluka's character was closer than many he had made. He had seen too often the greedy, yearning look in the dark eyes of the native as they roved over Burch's and Fallon's possessions. A rifle and shells, or even so much as a hunting knife, would have transported Maluka to a seventh heaven of delight. And these articles would at the same

time have increased enormously his prestige as chief.

Burch intended to make Maluka a present of Fallon's equipment. There would be a string attached, of course. But Burch didn't think Maluka would object—or even hesitate.

As he hurried toward the village, Burch thought eagerly of the emeralds. They would be his—afterward. The gems represented his Open Sesame to a life of ease and affluence in the States. As owner of his own mining firm, he would at last achieve an old ambition.

It was this ambition that had originally drawn him to South America, in search of quick wealth. A number of years had passed since then, but until he had met Fallon the easy riches he had sought had eluded him. Fallon had been immediately interested to learn of Burch's mining experience and geological background. He had suggested that they form a partnership with the object of locating valuable ore and mineral deposits. Brazilian mining interests, he had argued, would pay handsomely for the information, since attention was now turning to the untapped, vast natural resources of that country's wild and primitive interior. Technical progress had reached the point where profitable mining operations could be carried out, despite the obstacles of river and jungle.

Burch had accepted Fallon's offer as a last resort, agreeing to share equally in any discoveries made. They had accordingly purchased the necessary supplies and equipment, and hiring Pedro as a guide, had set out for the little known regions of the upper Amazon.

**E**VEN this final attempt had seemed doomed to failure. Burch and Fallon either hadn't been able to find ores and minerals of the kind for which they were searching, or had been un-

able to locate them in sufficiently large deposits. Then, in a deep gulley amid a range of hills, they had stumbled upon the emeralds. The quantity of gems now resting in the tobacco tin was all they had been able to find, the stream that had once passed through the gulley had obviously washed away any others untold years before.

But Burch was satisfied. With Fallon out of the way, the money he'd get for the emeralds would be more than sufficient for his purposes.

Reminded of his plans for Fallon, Burch's thoughts sharpened on his anticipated meeting with Maluka. He went carefully over what he would say to the native chief.

Burch's appearance in the Indian village was heralded by the yapping of mongrel dogs and the excited squeals of pot-bellied children. Women peeped with timid curiosity from the low doorways of thatched huts, while groups of squatting men reached stealthily for bows and spears.

Burch raised one hand in a gesture of peace. He approached the warriors slowly, smiling in friendly fashion. Then, indicating the huts questioningly, he spoke Maluka's name.

Several of the natives immediately sprang erect, motioning for Burch to follow. He was led to a hut that was considerably larger and more carefully constructed than the others. One of his guides disappeared inside, returning shortly with an invitation to enter.

Maluka was squat and powerful, with broad, typically flat Indian features, and shrewd, beady black eyes. He returned Burch's bow gravely and motioned for him to be seated.

Burch settled to a cross-legged position on the hard-packed earth floor, the chief duplicating the maneuver. Burch glanced around the hut. Several other natives, apparently members of Ma-



luka's immediate family, were present. By means of signs, Burch managed to inform Maluka that he wished for them to be alone.

The native hesitated a moment, then spoke in swift gutturals. After the others had filed out, he fastened an inquiring beady stare on Burch's face. He seemed aware of the fact that something unusual was in the offing.

Burch produced the handkerchief containing the cheap jewelry, spreading it out for the other's inspection. Maluka's gaze lighted at sight of the trinkets. He examined them eagerly, a grin of delight spreading over his face. Finally, with grunts evidently meant to express his satisfaction with the gifts, he returned his attention to Burch.

Employing sign language, interspersed with occasional spoken words, Burch began explaining the purpose of his visit. It was a slow and difficult process. Burch tried to make his pantomime as clear and concise as possible, yet certain ideas had to be repeated several times before Maluka finally understood them. He patiently kept at it, however, and at last was rewarded by an expression of full comprehension on Maluka's face—an expression at once apprehensive and eager.

Burch's proposition was simple. He began first of all with the falsehood that he and Fallon had become enemies, and that he now feared for his very life. Fallon, he explained, was after his possessions, this being a motive Maluka could readily understand and appreciate.

When the native had digested this, Burch went on to indicate that he was a man of peace. It was against his principles to take another's life. Yet he could not permit Fallon to live, because of the danger to himself. There was only one way out of this difficulty.

And that was for someone else to do what Burch's own better nature would not permit.

Now Burch made clear that he had noticed Maluka's evident desire to own the weapons and other articles used by white men like Fallon and himself. A rifle and ammunition, he pantomimed, would make Maluka a very great chief indeed. He would be able to conquer other tribes with ease and collect many heads—more heads, in fact, than any chief had ever possessed. And such things as a pair of binoculars and a flashlight would virtually elevate him to the rank of a god.

MALUKA nodded emphatically at this. His beady eyes glowed as though reflecting some wondrous inner vision.

Burch pointed out that Maluka could have these things by killing Fallon. He could, in fact, become the sole owner of everything Fallon now possessed. And in addition, he would have Fallon's head to add to his collection—a prize which alone was worth any risk.

But, Burch hastened to explain, there would hardly be any risk at all. An arrow would easily take care of Fallon. He would never know what had happened. And Burch would say nothing. White authorities would not know what Maluka had done. Burch would explain that Fallon had become lost in the jungle.

What about Pedro, the guide, Maluka wanted to know. Burch gestured that Pedro had just died from a snake bite. Maluka nodded thoughtfully, then signalled another question. What if white authorities made an investigation into Fallon's disappearance? Maluka, Burch answered, had no reason to worry. He would know when an investigation was on the way. He had

always known in the past. He would have time to hide all his new belongings before the police came.

Maluka stared thoughtfully at the ground. Greed and fear struggled for mastery in his broad, flat face. The greed won, as Burch had felt certain it would.

Maluka nodded at Burch. He motioned to show that Burch need no longer worry. Fallon would be taken care of. He, Maluka, would see to it in person.

After a solemn exchange of formalities, Burch hurried back to camp. He was relieved to find that Fallon hadn't returned while he was gone. Quickly laying aside his weapons, he began preparing the evening meal. The food would divert any suspicions Fallon might have about what Burch had been doing while he was away.

A short time later, Fallon appeared. He nodded in approval at Burch's activities and sat down with weary stiffness. "Well, that's that," he said. "Pedro's taken care of. As for us, we'll get ready to leave like we were planning. We'll start packing in the morning."

Burch indicated ready agreement, his inner reaction one of grim mockery. Fallon was a fool. He didn't know Burch was the only one who would leave. He didn't know his head, after it had been properly smoked and shrunk, would adorn some hidden native temple, while his belongings would become the property of Maluka. Nor did he know that his share of the emeralds would go to Burch.

Presently Burch had the food set out. He and Fallon ate, and not long after the swift tropic night closed down.

The following morning Burch and Fallon began their preparations for leaving. On Fallon's part, at least, his

calm behavior showed he expected to leave. Burch was tense. He knew Maluka would strike at any moment, and he kept his hand near his revolver in the fear that something might go wrong.

Returning to camp after having carried a load of equipment to the dugouts at the edge of the river, Burch found Fallon in deep sign language conversation with a native. Burch approached slowly, his nerves tightening in alarm. In another moment he recognized the native as Kivoro, whom Fallon had rescued from the crocodiles.

Kivoro, Burch recalled, had been on his way back to the village from a solitary hunting trip downriver, when his dugout had overturned against a partly submerged log which had been floating with the current. A number of crocodiles had immediately gone after him. Fallon had happened to be near the river at the time, doing some hunting of his own. He had witnessed the accident and Kivoro's ensuing peril, and had used his rifle to keep the crocodiles at bay while Kivoro swam to shore. The native had been a frequent visitor after that, having conceived an almost dog-like devotion for Fallon.

NOW Burch's thoughts narrowed anxiously on the fact of Kivoro's presence in camp. He came forward stealthily, trying to make out what was being said. But Kivoro obviously had been watching for Burch's return. The native's jungle-trained eyes caught sight of Burch through the intervening vegetation. He whirled instantly and darted out of sight.

Burch's suspicions abruptly hardened. Had Kivoro come to warn Fallon of his and Maluka's plan, having somehow found out about it? That seemed likely, to judge from the guilty furtiveness of Kivoro's actions.

Dread trembled through Burch. Then he thought of the emeralds, and his courage was renewed. He brushed the holster of the revolver at his side with his fingertips, sudden cunning flaring into his brain. He forced himself to walk casually toward Fallon, as thought nothing had happened.

"Wasn't that Kivoro?" he asked.

Fallon nodded slowly, frowning. "I don't know if I understood him right, but from the motions he made it seems Maluka is planning to kill me."

A strange quiet settled over Burch. "Where did Kivoro get that idea?"

"He overheard Maluka talking to old Jaleke, the village witchdoctor. Maluka told Jaleke he was going to take my head, and he wanted Jaleke to give him a lucky charm, so he wouldn't fail. I don't think Kivoro was lying. Besides, he has a position in the village close to Jaleke, and could actually overhear a lot of things. Once, when acting as interpreter for us, Pedro told me Kivoro was apprenticed to Jaleke, learning the business so he could take over when Jaleke died."

"Screwy," Burch grunted.

"The screwiest part of it," Fallon said softly, "is that Kivoro insists *you* put Maluka up to it. He told me you were in the village yesterday, to see Maluka."

Burch laughed. "Why would I do that?"

"For the emeralds, of course. You see, if Maluka wanted my head he'd have to get you out of the way, so you wouldn't tell the authorities. But he's after me alone—and that means you made a deal with him!"

Burch moved explosively. His hand had been inching toward his holstered revolver even as Fallon spoke. Now he jerked the weapon out, levelling it grimly.

"All right, I'll admit it! I arranged

with Maluka to get you out of the way. And for the emeralds, as you guessed. I have big plans for the future. I don't intend to let—"

Burch broke off as he saw Fallon abruptly stiffen. A brief expression of pain and surprise flitted over the big engineer's face. He swayed forward, then fell heavily. He didn't move again. An instant later, sighting the arrow that protruded from Fallon's back, Burch understood what had happened.

Maluka came trotting out of the jungle, his broad features split by a grin. He gestured with the bow he held in one hand, then pointed at Fallon's still form.

Burch expressed the approval he knew was expected of him. He motioned to show that Maluka had arrived just in time. Fallon had attempted an attack, and he, Burch, had managed to turn the tables and hold the other at bay.

This ceremony over with, Burch cautioned Maluka to be extremely careful in disposing of Fallon. There must be nothing for white authorities to find should an investigation be made. Maluka nodded gravely. He waved his hands to show he knew the penalty for his crime and would take every precaution.

**F**INALLY Burch began pointing out the articles which now belonged to Maluka. This was almost everything in camp, since Burch intended to travel as lightly as possible, taking only the emeralds, his weapons, food, and a few blankets. He had a supply of Brazilian money for river steamer passage, and once back in civilization, the emeralds would provide him with everything he needed.

Burch began his preparations for leaving, while Maluka fondled his new possessions with the ecstatic joy of a

child on Christmas morning.

Soon Burch had his load stowed away in one of the dugouts. Waving farewell to Maluka, he climbed in and shoved off.

Almost a week later, paddling almost constantly by day and sleeping in the dugout at night, Burch chanced upon a river boat returning to its home port with a cargo of wood, fruit, and nuts. Amid many Latin exclamations of sympathy and wonderment—for Burch's appearance testified that his trip had been anything but an easy one—he was taken aboard. He explained that his partner and their guide had gone hunting in the jungle and had not returned. He had waited for them until certain that something had happened. Deciding that they had fallen victims to headhunting tribes in the vicinity, and fearing for his own life, he had set out back to civilization.

His story was not questioned. Nor was it questioned by the authorities to whom it was subsequently repeated. The dangers of the jungle were well known. Burch's partner and the guide were not the first to disappear. They would not be the last. Investigations seldom revealed anything. The jungle hid its secrets well.

With this hurdle behind him, Burch embarked on the task of selling part of the emeralds. He was painstakingly careful, unloading only one or two at a time, and flying from city to city among the larger South American nations. He changed his name and effected a different disguise after each transaction. The dwindling supply of emeralds was transported from place to place in a cunning way—in the cavities of ore samples, which were covered over with clay or plaster.

He followed these tactics even after his arrival in the States. The sizeable fortune which was rapidly accumulat-

ing, he locked away in the safe deposit boxes of numerous banks, using a different name at each.

Finally he settled in San Francisco, renting a large and luxuriously furnished apartment, and filling its capacious closets with expensive clothes. Then, carefully creating for himself a wholly fictitious background, he began making contacts, his object the mining firm he intended to start. He soon had many new acquaintances—most of whom were undoubtedly attracted by his evident affluence. Employing his knack for judging character, he gathered around himself a group of individuals whose nature he had decided was as unscrupulous and crafty as his own. With their help a mining corporation was eventually founded that had a quite imposing list of dummy stockholders.

Three years passed. Burch prospered. He insinuated himself into the most exclusive society circles, and before long had many wealthy and cultured friends.

Meanwhile, in an obscure Indian village beside a narrow tributary of the upper Amazon, a number of interesting events took place. Jaleke, the old witchdoctor, succumbed at last to the ravages of time. He was succeeded by Kivoro, who, as the latter's apprentice, had long since been prepared for this emergency. Kivoro, in fact, had become unusually adept in handling the strange and mysterious lore of his profession. It was well known that Jaleke had been highly pleased with him, and the villagers, to whom the ministrations of the witchdoctor were an important necessity, were quite satisfied with the change.

A SHORT time after Kivoro took over his new duties, Maluka, the chief, died as the result of a sudden

illness. It could have been a coincidence—though had any of the villagers known of the deep and secret hatred that Kivoro had harbored against Maluka since Fallon's murder, they would have had grave doubts. All the villagers knew, however, was that Kivoro did his best to keep the spark of life burning in Maluka's bloated shell. They did not blame him for his failure. It was generally agreed that Maluka's excesses had made him the victim of demons too numerous and powerful for even the magic of Kivoro to prevail against.

Few tears were shed for the deceased chief. Since he had somehow come into possession of the red-haired white man's property—and also of the red-haired white man's head—Maluka had slowly drifted down the road to unpopularity. Using the red-haired white man's magical weapons, he had quickly conquered several neighboring tribes, making his own rich and powerful in the process. But victory and the ownership of articles such as no other Indian possessed had gone to Maluka's head. He had become cruel, domineering, and unjust, giving himself up to a constant orgy of eating and drinking. The tribe considered itself well rid of him.

Along with these momentous occurrences, still another took place—perhaps the most important of all. Close upon the heels of Maluka's demise, Fallon's head disappeared from the chief's collection. The theft was only perfunctorily investigated, for the head had come to be regarded as an object of bad luck. Had a serious investigation been made, the head would have been found hidden in Kivoro's hut. It did not remain there long, however. One night, after a curious and secret ceremony in which Kivoro did much chanting and burning of herbs, the head disappeared again.

Burch would have been interested to know that. But he was thousands of miles away, engrossed in a fascinating round of expensive parties and lucrative business transactions. Like Maluka before him, he was living high on the fruits of success.

Too high, in fact. His constant and over-generous consumption of imported liquors, rich foods, and luxurious cigars brought on a sudden heart-attack. He was warned by the doctor who attended him to be more careful in the future. Burch, the doctor explained, had developed a serious heart condition.

As time passed, memory of the attack gradually faded into the background of Burch's mind. He succumbed once more to the blandishments of easy living, and before long he reached his former level of dangerous over-indulgence.

Early one morning he returned from a party at which he had drunk even more than usual. Amid a pleasant, alcoholic fog, he let himself into his apartment and began undressing for bed. He hummed a popular song that had been played that evening as he blithely tossed his discarded garments about the room.

It was great to be alive, he told himself. He had never felt better.

Humming the song all over again, he crossed unsteadily to the bureau for a pair of pajamas. It was then that he noticed the object resting on the bureau top.

He fixed uncertain eyes on it, struck at once by a sense of familiarity. In another moment he realized what the object was.

A head. A human head, strangely small and wrinkled.

And then he saw that the head had red hair and a pale scar shaped like a half-moon high on one cheek-bone. Recognition washed over him in a chill-

ing wave of horror. There was only one person who'd had red hair and a scar like that—Fallon!

There could be no doubt about it, then. *This was Fallon's head!*

Burch trembled, a dizzy weakness rushing over him. How had the head reached this apartment? How had it—

The head opened its eyes and looked at him.

Burch released a choked scream of terror. There was an abrupt pain in his heart. He collapsed limply to the floor as a curtain of blackness dropped over his mind.

**T**HE attack was not a fatal one. When Burch regained his grip on awareness, his first fully conscious action was to glance at the bureau top. He stared in dazed surprise.

The head was gone!

He kept his gaze for long, dreading seconds on the spot where it had rested. Finally he climbed with painful slowness to his feet. He felt strangely feeble. There was a stifled sensation in his chest, and it was difficult to breathe. A haze seemed to float before his eyes.

He swayed, blinked around the room. Perhaps, he thought suddenly, the head was still in the apartment somewhere. He began to search, rushing from one room to another.

He found nothing. He decided that there had never been a head in the apartment. He had been drinking. What he had seen was merely the result of an alcohol-stimulated imagination. Nothing more. Fallon's head was thousands of miles away, in a stinking Indian village.

He became aware of an odd fluttering in his chest, no doubt brought on by his exertions after the attack. Alarm touched him. His heart. The strain had been too much. He should have heeded the advice of that doctor.

He decided to summon the man at once. He looked up the telephone number, and put in a call. The doctor promised to come immediately.

With that precaution taken, Burch remembered his intention to obtain a pair of pajamas. He went to the bureau—first having made certain that Fallon's head had not reappeared. He opened the proper drawer and reached in.

Something hard and sharp closed with a snap about his fingers.

With a gasp, Burch jerked back his hand. In the next instant he saw what had fastened onto him—the head!

The bared teeth were locked on his fingers, the open eyes glaring up at him with a terrible eagerness. Burch shrieked and tried to shake the horror loose. It clung stubbornly. And then, as Burch momentarily ceased his efforts to dislodge the head, the jaws opened, the head seemed to give a weirdly disembodied hop through the air, and the teeth closed down once more—this time on Burch's wrist.

Unutterable, mind-wrenching fright held Burch paralyzed. The head gave another hop. The teeth gripped on Burch's forearm.

Another hop. The teeth sank into Burch's biceps.

Scream after frantic scream tore from Burch. He knew what was going to happen. He was too weak to prevent it. The room was whirling around him. His body seemed to have turned to jelly. The fluttering in his chest was stronger. And now there was pain—sharp, repeated, insistent.

Another hop. The teeth snapped on Burch's shoulder.

Another hop. And now the head's eyes glared in triumph, and its lips peeled back in a wolfish grin of victory, as its teeth closed vengefully on Burch's throat.

Burch's strangled screams abruptly died. There was a pain in his chest sharper than the others. Blackness exploded in his mind—the deep, all-pervading blackness of eternal oblivion.

Aroused tenants broke in the door of Burch's apartment a short time later. The doctor arrived just as they were

crowding into the bedroom.

Burch was pronounced dead of heart failure. The doctor, however, was unable to explain the toothmarks on Burch's hand, along his arm, and on his throat. The apartment was searched carefully. But nothing was found which could have caused them.

# "DREAM" WORLDS

★ **By Carter T. Wainwright** ★

**T**HE subject of dreams is an inexhaustible one. Almost a whole science has been inspired by them—that of psychoanalysis. Dr. Sigmund Freud attached so much significance to dreams that the word "dream" and the word "Freud" are almost synonymous. This is as it should be for Shakespeare's lines seemed to have summed it up properly, "We are such stuff as dreams are made on, and our little lives are rounded with a sleep."

Aside from the psychological significance of dreams, there are some other facets of the subject that are extremely interesting. Poets have been strongly influenced by dreams and in fact have produced work practically created in their dream worlds. Coleridge and his "Kublai Khan" are superb examples of that sort of thing. He claimed that the poem came to him in a dream when he saw that fantastic world of Xanadu as a reality. The poem is incomplete because the dream was interrupted. There is no reason to doubt this. Whole schools of poetry and philosophy have evolved around the inability of some to distinguish what is real and what is a dream. The poetry of the Frenchman Beaudelaire, of the last century, is a striking example of that. It is as if one is in the process of experiencing a dream as one reads his poetry. Not only in poetry and philosophy have these ideas been projected. Even in science which tends to look askance on anything connected with dreams and dreamers, do we find examples of men whose most profound thoughts have been inspired by dreams. Dreams are in many respects excellent stimulants to creative thinking. The world of art is not alone in having its dreamers.

Pierre Berthon, who is noted for some original creative work in the design of such prosaic things as valve-gears for steam engines, and in the development of certain high temperature alloy steels, has related a dream that inspired him to develop an unusual and effective type of valve-gear for steam-switching in stationary steam-engines. He said:

"I went to bed, my mind filled with the problem of how to shut the entry ports in time with the proper position of the piston. This problem had occupied me for three days and was constantly on my mind. I thought about it even when I ate. I remember the dream vividly, because it made a tremendous impression on me as well as giving me the answer to my problem.

"I seemed to be in a huge room, almost cave-like. All about me were strange and weird mechanisms, making loud noises in my ears. I remember being terrified to the extreme. I walked forward slowly, not knowing where I was going. A voice whispered in my ear, 'Pierre, it is here, it is here, it is here.' I did not know what that meant but I looked. I felt as if I was floating in and about the odd machinery rather than walking. I kept saying to myself, 'It is a gear, isn't it?' I didn't really know what this meant. Then a heavy vapor—I can't remember the color of it—started to flow over and fill the room. It was cold and clammy. Some of the fog detached itself from the rest, assumed the shape of an arrow, and hovered near one machine. It was *my* machine. I recognized it at once and I saw exactly how the valve-gear operated. Then the dream vanished and I awakened. I went immediately to my drawing table and examined the sketches I had made during the day. I incorporated the changes I had seen in the dream. It—they—were the correct ones. I had designed the proper mechanism in my dream!"

As it turned out, this was the proper design. Pierre Berthon's experience is not unique. There have been others who have done exactly the same thing. Science can give no explanation other than the trite "it was the intense concentration that did it!" This is unsatisfactory. There is some unknown—as yet—and mysterious agent that enables these things to happen. Perhaps when psychic research reaches the intense levels of conventional work, the answer to this mystery will be found.

\* \* \*





# The SPIRIT of TOFFEE

by Charles F. Myers



The bank was thrown into a state of confusion as the money bags floated toward the door . . .

**I**N HIS private office the guiding light of the Pillsworth Advertising Agency sat behind his desk and looked slightly haunted.

And Marc Pillsworth was not the sort to look haunted without a good and sufficient reason. In this case, the reason seemed to be not only good and sufficient but rather spine-tingling into the bargain. Marc closed his eyes and made a real effort to suppress a nagging impulse to scream. But when he looked again the situation across the room had not noticeably bettered itself; the shoe was still in front of the chair, hanging indolently in mid-air.

In the last few minutes Marc had closed his eyes repeatedly, telling himself that the shoe was only a product of his imagination, an apparition born of a mind that had given way under an overwhelming burden of financial and domestic worries. But always, when he opened his eyes again, the shoe was still there, resting rakishly on nothing at all, seeming to stare at him evilly with its beady eyelettes. Also, there was something about the hateful thing that bespoke its owner's rather pungent personality. It had a look about it that was unmistakably aw-got-to-hell. It was a look that Marc found particularly distasteful, for it could mean only one thing. No getting away from it. George was back. And Marc wished he wasn't.

Marc had learned of George's existence through a previous experience so bitter it all but galled him just to think about it. When the ghost, Marc's own, to be explicit, had first descended to this region under the misapprehension that Marc had accidentally terminated his own earthly sojourn, he immediately impressed himself on everyone as a trouble maker of the first hot water. And, as though his strikingly original haunting activities hadn't been enough,

he had resorted to random methods of mayhem in an effort to make Marc's demise an untidy actuality so that he, George, might thereby secure his own position as a permanent earthly "haunt." The affair had not been a picnic for Marc.

Though the wayward spectre, when materialized, was an exact duplicate of Marc in all physical respects, there the similarity did a screaming about face and streaked rapidly in the opposite direction. Where Marc was sober and serious-minded, George was a veritable connoisseur of all things viceful and frivolous. And where Marc was inherently honest, modest and retiring, George was frankly a crook, a braggart and rank exhibitionist. Also, it was not consoling that the spirit was extremely careless in the manipulation of his ectoplasm . . . a thing that any other, right-minded ghost would go to any lengths not to be.

If Marc looked on the reappearance of George without pleasure, his attitude was not entirely unwarranted.

Marc glanced at the shoe again and shuddered. Absently he wondered how he would ever manage to explain the silly thing if someone should suddenly pop into the office unannounced. Obviously, something had to be done about it; he couldn't just let it go on dangling there, looking smug and complacent like that. And certainly it showed no inclination to leave of its own accord. In fact, it seemed quite content, as though it might just go on hanging around forever. Clearly, the situation demanded positive action. With quiet deliberation Marc lifted a bronze paper weight from his desk and aimed it with care.

The weight only grazed the toe of the shoe and fell dully to the carpet. But at least it produced some effect. The shoe instantly vanished. Marc leaned

back and pressed a trembling hand to his eyes. Then he glanced quickly up through a haze of apprehension as a voice . . . a duplicate of his own . . . echoed across the room

"Well, I'll be damned!" it exclaimed. "My ectoplasm must have slipped. How long has that shoe been showing?"

"Showing?" Marc said in a voice sounding a good deal less like his own than the other. "The awful thing has had me close to gurgling dementia for nearly ten minutes now. And if you must speak to me, please have the decent good grace to show yourself. It makes my spine fairly lurch to hear a voice coming out of nowhere like that."

MARC didn't realize the folly of his request until too late. Piecemeal, an arm, a leg, a mid-section at a time, George became visible, looking exactly like Marc right down to the last button.

Marc gazed on this phenomenon with utmost revulsion. "Can't you materialize all at the same time?" he asked fretfully. "Do you always have to come into my presence looking like the victim of a hatchet murder?"

George grinned agreeably. "Sorry," he said. "Can't concentrate on everything at once, you know."

"It seems you could at least concentrate on consecutive things," Marc grumbled. "You needn't break out like a rash." He looked up and blanched. Neckless, George's head was hovering over his collar like a loosely anchored balloon. "Oh, Lord!" he gasped. "How sordid!"

The head glanced around pleasantly, unaware of its airy isolation. It gazed admiringly down the length of the lean body beneath it. "Rather a nice job," it said proudly. "No foggy spots. Everything very flesh-and-bloody looking, I think."

"Bloody is right!" Marc croaked. "It all but drips with gore. For heaven sake complement that head with a neck before I scream."

George flushed prettily, closed his eyes and obliged. The missing neck sprang cooperatively into place. To Marc the spectacle was almost as repulsive as the disconnected head.

"Don't ever do that again," he breathed. "I'd never live through it."

"I'll try to be more careful in the future," George agreed.

Marc turned a quizzical eye on the ghost. He was being far too agreeable . . . almost sickeningly so. In his face there was a sort of determined pleasantness that looked ill at ease in such unfamiliar surroundings. A suspicion stirred vaguely in the back of Marc's mind.

"If you think you're going to kill me with kindness, you back-stabber, just forget it. It won't work."

"How can you think such things?" George asked woundedly.

"It just came to me, all of a sudden, looking at your smirking face."

"You do me a terrible injustice," George replied. "You cut me to the quick."

"Believe me," Marc said relentlessly, "I'd make it deeper if I could."

"You're going to be ashamed you've spoken to me like this," George said. "I've come here to do you a favor."

"Then do me one. Go away. I've enough trouble as it is."

"Trouble?" George asked with sudden interest. "What kind of trouble?"

"Everything serious," Marc said. "Especially now that you're here."

George smiled thoughtfully. "Conditions seem about perfect for my mission," he murmured.

"Mission?" Marc looked on the spirit with open consternation.

"It's the High Council," George ex-

plained. "The big brass in the spirit world. They're making me do penance for the way I behaved the last time I was here." A shamefaced expression swept over his features. "They threw the book at me. They say I've set Spirit-Mortal relations back five hundred years and knocked their good neighbor policy into a cocked hat. Anyway, the upshot of the thing is that they've ordered me back here to haunt you until I've done you a good turn to make up for last time. And if I don't . . ." Here his voice broke with emotion and he shuddered. "They've only given me thirty six hours to make good." He waved an unhappy hand at his materialized body. "And I can't stay like this too long, either. They only gave me an emergency issue of ectoplasm, so I have to use it sparingly." He looked at Marc pleadingly. "Though the idea thoroughly repels me, you've just got to let me do something nice for you. What can I do?"

"Off hand," Marc said unpleasantly, "I can think of any number of things for you to do. Without exception they are fatal and extremely messy."

"You don't like me very well, do you?"

"Since you force me to say it," Marc said flatly, "you disgust me. You disgust me through and through."

George glanced up, interested. "Through and through what?" he asked.

MARC'S hand slapped hard against the desk. "Now, don't start that!" he grated. "This time, keep your simpering banalities to yourself."

"I only wanted to know . . ."

"Enough!"

"But if I'm going to do something nice for you," George continued doggedly, "I have to know what's troubling you, don't I? That's why

I've been sitting around here half the night and all morning. Ever since midnight, I've been waiting right here for something to turn up that I could help you with."

Marc looked distressed. "Must you help me, George?" he pleaded. "Can't you just go on back to this Council thing of yours and tell them everything's all right. Tell them I love you like a brother. Lie your head off. You can do it. Only, please, please, don't try to help me."

George sank back in his chair with a sigh. "I couldn't do that," he said. "If I did, they'd . . ."

Suddenly he stopped speaking as a knock sounded on the door. He shot Marc an anxious glance.

"Dematerialize!" Marc hissed. "Disappear!"

George was instantly out of his chair, completely confused in his eagerness to do exactly as Marc wished. First a leg disappeared, then an arm, then his entire torso became foggy and vaporous. Suddenly the arm and leg reappeared again. He looked up at Marc, panic stricken, as the lower part of his face faded up to the nose, then stopped. He closed his eyes and seemed to concentrate with all his will. For a moment his entire body flickered like a weakening light bulb, disappeared, and promptly rematerialized in total.

"For Pete's sake!" Marc cried. "Do you have to keep flashing on and off like an electrical advertisement? Fade out, will you?"

The distress in George's face was genuine. He was earnestly doing everything he could to cooperate. "I'm too excited," he said. "Emotional disturbances always react on me this way."

The knock suddenly sounded on the door again, and Marc started as though he'd been struck. "Calm down!" he yelled. "For the love of heaven, be

"calm!"

George nodded, closed his eyes and breathed deeply several times. Slowly, a section at a time, he faded from sight.

Marc turned relievedly to the door. "Come in!" he called. Then turning back, he suddenly yelled, "No! Stay out!"

Like a great brown rat, George's shoe was loping lazily across the room. Apparently the spirit was habitually forgetful of this particular extremity. Marc raced after it and came abreast of it just as it reached the chair. He swung his foot behind him and kicked viciously. The shoe faded just in time to save itself, and Marc's foot collided painfully with the chair. Moaning, he sat down helplessly on the floor and began to nurse the offended member. Then, at the sound of Memphis' voice, he glanced up with horrified eyes. The secretary was observing him interestedly from the doorway.

"A new dance step?" she asked tonelessly.

"Just . . . just getting a little exercise," Marc stammered lamely. "Got to tone up the old system once in a while, you know. Push-ups." He flexed his arms in half-hearted demonstration.

Memphis moved uncertainly into the room and closed the door. "Look out that chair doesn't push back," she said.

Marc laughed nervously and got to his feet. "I slipped," he said.

"Well," Memphis said resignedly, since you've already cracked, I guess these can't hurt you too much." She extended a hand full of papers and dropped them on the desk. "Bills," she announced.

"The show?" Marc asked soberly.

Memphis nodded. "I dropped in at rehearsal last night, just out of morbid curiosity." She said it in a tone of voice generally reserved for use in fun-

eral parlors and morgues. "I caught one of Julie's numbers." A look of utmost discomfort rested curiously on her ruddy face. "Sorry, Mr. Pillsworth."

Obviously Memphis was acting as the close friend who always consoles the bereaved.

Marc didn't know when the bug of theatrical ambition had begun to gnaw at the foundations of his home, but he was willing to bet an attractive sum that the craven little termite had been at its ravenous work for years, considering the matrimonial and financial devastation its insidious activities had wrought in just the last few weeks.

JULIE'S days as a model and "lady of the chorus" had dawned and waned long before Marc had ever met her. And that being the case, he was all too willing to forgive and forget them. Even in moments of domestic stress, when their handsome ghosts stalked arrogantly through his parlor, bedroom and bath, keeping Julie company as she proclaimed her intention to leave him and resume her "career" . . . even then he refused to pay them any serious attention.

However, he might have displayed more wisdom had he given those days all the studied attention due a plan of atomic control, particularly during the last few months, during which, in Julie's reminiscences, they had taken on a more intense, misty-eyed glamour. But what Marc didn't know was that one of Julie's erstwhile chorus girl friends had recently arrived at a rather spectacular Broadway success.

For Julie, certain envious reactions had followed this event like a poison oak rash after an active day in the woods. The persistent weed of ambition that had been languishing in her innermost heart all these years sudden-

ly flourished and blossomed forth like a tangle of deadly nightshade. From that moment on, though Marc was blissfully unaware of it at the time, the future of the Pillsworth marriage and bankroll was in deadly peril. Even Marc's better judgment was in jeopardy, for when it came to psychological warfare, Julie was just the girl to teach the War Department a trick or two that would probably curl its hair. It was no time at all before Marc was financing a fabulously expensive musical comedy, entitled "Love's Gone Winging," and wondering what had ever possessed him. And all this on top of several outstandingly bad investments. The future was dusky indeed, if it still existed at all.

Marc stared unhappily at Memphis. "Pretty bad, huh?" he asked.

"If I told you what I think of your wife's talents, Mr. Pillsworth," Memphis said regretfully, "you'd either have to fight me or fire me. Maybe both. Mrs. Pillsworth may be a star tonight, but I bet she does a faster nose-dive than Halley's Comet. I hope she's getting a good rest today. She's going to need her strength."

Marc shook his head. "Got any idea what the total costs are so far?"

Memphis gazed unhappily out the window. "I'd rather not say," she murmured. "You'd think I was lying. I would, too. There just isn't that much money." Her gaze moved self-consciously from the window to the carpet. "The bank wants to see you right away," she added. "They were gentle but, oh, so firm."

Marc flinched. "I guess I'll have to see them," he said. "While I'm gone be a good secretary and make me a reservation in the nearest bread line."

"Don't give up the ship," Memphis said. "We can at least go down fighting. Even if it's only the creditors.

In the meantime, business as usual. What do you want me to do about the Carmichael Aspirin Account?"

"I don't know," Marc said wearily. "See if they give free samples."

Memphis crossed to the door. "Well," she said with forced jauntiness, "I'll think of something. Maybe I'll just roll it up and fry it in deep fat." She slapped her girdle. "And I'm just the kid that could do it."

When she had gone, Marc turned forlornly to the window. He wasn't actually thinking of jumping, he was just wondering how long it would be before he did start thinking of it. Then he started as invisible hands began to pat industriously at the back of his coat.

"Stop that!" he yelled.

"I was only brushing you off," George's voice said, near at hand. "You got a little messed up on the floor."

"I'll dust myself," Marc said. "Thank you, just the same."

"I sure wish I could think of a way to straighten things out for you."

"Just forget it," Marc said. "Don't trouble your invisible little head about it."

"You need money," George mused. "That's the key to the whole problem as I see it."

"Sometimes," Marc said sarcastically, "you show signs of true genius."

George made strange musing noises for a moment. Then, unexpectedly, he asked, "Where's Toffee?"

MARC started visibly. He hadn't thought of Toffee in a long time, and he didn't particularly want to think of her now. One supernatural creature at a time was more than enough. Especially at a time like this.

Also, Marc was shudderingly mindful of Toffee's intimate relationship with pandemonium; the two of them

romped about, hand in hand, like a pair of grade-school sweethearts. The most remarkable thing about Toffee, though, was that, in fact as well as fancy, she sprang from the very depths of Marc's own subconscious mind. Marc had long ago reconciled himself to the uneasy fact that his mind sheltered a precocious spirit who might, at almost any moment, be released into the world of actuality, and materialize right there before his astonished eyes. Then, too, there was Toffee's penchant for snatching the affairs of his life from his own grasp and instilling in them the breath of sheer madness. It was a difficult pill to swallow, and one that was rarely graced with a sugar coating. Even if she did manage to leave his life in a fair state of repair, her methods always put him through such a rigorous program of mental anguish that the end seemed hardly to justify the means at all. Marc tried to turn his thoughts away from her, for to think of her might easily start the chain of psychological reaction that always provoked her reappearance. He wished that George hadn't remembered the girl from his previous visit.

"I don't know where she is," he said. "Let's just try to forget her, shall we? Things are confused enough already. In the meantime, I've got to get down to the bank." He frowned thoughtfully. "But what am I going to do with you?"

"Oh, I'll come along!" George said eagerly. "There's no telling where I might stumble onto just the sort of thing I'm looking for. What's a bank?"

"They keep money in a bank," Marc said absently. Finally he shrugged. "I guess I'll just have to put you on your honor, though I've a feeling it's rather like putting a man-eating tiger on a lettuce diet. You'll have to promise to stay here and keep out of sight. I'll

lock the office door so no one will walk in and surprise you. Do you promise?"

A perfunctory "uh-huh" echoed from George's direction. Then there was a brief scuffling sound and Marc's hat whirled crazily from the rack in the corner, flashed across the room and settled in a raffish angle on its owner's startled head. Invisible hands began to fuss at Marc's tie.

"Don't!" Marc cried. "How often do I have to tell you I don't want to be helped? Why can't you be yourself? I think I liked you better when you were trying to do me in."

"I want you to make a good impression," George explained.

Marc started toward the door. "That's very nice of you, I'm sure. But all I ask is that you just remember to behave yourself while I'm away."

"Oh, I will!" George's voice proclaimed earnestly. "I will!"

If Marc's mind hadn't been so filled with dread of the impending meeting at the bank he might have noticed that the voice was being just a little too earnest.

MARC turned the grey business coupe into a side street and headed for the parking lot behind the bank. He wasn't thinking too much, though, about what he was doing. Instead, his mind was occupied with a sneaking suspicion. There was something strange about the car, something odd about the feel of it and the way it rode. The body seemed to lean to the left a bit, almost as though someone were clinging to the side. Also, there had been the incident at the intersection, when a truck had broken through the light and headed directly toward the grey coupe. He could have sworn someone yelled at him to look out, someone very close to his left ear. It had given him a creepy feeling at the

time. And thinking back on it, he was no longer so certain about the gust of wind that had brushed past him as he was closing the office door. It might have been . . .

Reaching the parking lot, he swung the car quickly to the right, into a drive, and pressed down on the gas as it turned onto a short, steep incline. Then he went tense in his seat. The post and chain barrier hadn't been visible from the street. Neither had the sign saying, "Use Other Entrance." And now that they were visible, there wasn't time to do anything about them. Sign, posts and chain were swarming over the car in a rush.

There was a tearing, whacking sound and the coupe jerked wickedly to the right. Suddenly, the steering wheel seemed to be leaving its post, spiraling upward toward Marc's face. A split second later everything went black to the raucous accompaniment of a blaring horn.

The horn continued to scream in the darkness, and, to Marc, its windy blast seemed to be hurling him outward. He shot swiftly out and up into lightless, unknown regions, his body curiously unhampered by the faintest trace of atmospheric resistance. He sailed through space, arms outspread, unrestrained, as though in a vacuum, and strangely, he felt wonderfully free, almost exultant. As he moved further into the distance the sound of the horn took on a thin, silvery tone that was almost musical.

Then, slowly, like a projectile approaching the apex of its arc, his body began to lose momentum. For a time there was the sensation of treading air as a swimmer treads water. Gradually, he churned to a complete, suspended stop. He felt himself hovering precariously in mid-air, and then, all of a sudden, he plunged downward.

In his descent there was no sense of

easy motion as there had been before. Instead, he was falling rapidly, hurtling through the dark, a tangled mass of helpless arms and legs. His efforts to fight the force that was sucking him downward were useless. Then, sooner and more easily than he had expected, he came to rest. All at once there was a soft, cool surface beneath him that seemed to give with his weight, then lift him gently.

But his relief was shattered by a sudden, terrifying blast from the ghostly horn. Instantly, light began to show through the blackness which was being ripped into fleeting whisps and fragments by a strong, angry wind. Oddly, though, the wind didn't seem to affect Marc; it was blowing all about him without stirring so much as a hair on his head. He sat up and gazed at the scene before him as the last remnants of the shredded blackness disappeared into the distance. At once, the wind died and everything became quiet.

Marc was in the very center of a small grove of strange feathery trees that seemed to have deliberately arranged themselves into a perfect circle. A light blue mist lay motionless beneath the trees, blending softly into the green mossy carpet upon which he was resting. There was a cool restfulness about the place which he recognized at once. It was the feeling that always came to him when he entered the valley of his own mind.

He threw his hands out behind him on the grass and leaned back luxuriously. He was just closing his eyes when a soft sound whispered against the grass behind him. He started to swing about, but he was too slow. Mid-way, two cool hands pressed down gently over his eyes and two lips closed simultaneously over his mouth. The lips were not nearly so cool or so gentle as the hands, and they went directly to the



business of kissing him with an air of abandon and authority. Marc struggled away from them.

"Guess who, you old monster," a voice whispered gaily.

"Unhand me, you perfidious little heller," Marc grated.

"Beast!"

THE hands snapped away from Marc's eyes, and he looked up to see Toffee scowling down at him. Her green eyes were alive with annoyance, and her red hair hung loosely about her shoulders like cascading flame. Her transparent emerald-colored tunic was, as always, a completely disinterested party when it came to the matter of concealing her comely figure. One gold-sandaled foot was tapping a silent tattoo against the grass.

"Sometimes," she said evenly, "you turn my stomach. The way you keep shoving me away from you all the time, you'd think I wasn't gorgeous or something. It's beginning to ruin my self-confidence. Just a little peck or pat at the proper moment wouldn't hurt you any, you know."

"Do you have to be quite so effusive with your greetings?" Marc asked timidly. "Couldn't we just shake hands?"

"Shake hands!" Toffee exploded. "If that doesn't take the brass-lined girdle! I don't care what you shake. You can shimmy from one end of this valley to the other, but you needn't expect me to be a party to it. I wash my hands of you. And good riddance!"

And with that, she retreated to the far side of the grove and draped herself angrily against a tree, arms folded. She regarded Marc icily from the corner of her eye.

"Of all the thankless, gutless worms, I would have to wind up with you," she muttered. "You'd look good with your ugly head bashed in."

Marc flinched. "I'm sorry," he began cautiously. "I . . ."

Toffee was instantly in his arms, and he hadn't the faintest idea how she had gotten there.

"I knew you couldn't resist me," she cooed. "If you're really sorry . . ."

"Wait a minute!" Marc yelled, trying to free himself. "I didn't mean . . ."

The words froze on his lips. Over Toffee's slender shoulder he could see the blackness, whole again, rushing down on him, borne on the tide of the shrieking wind. His hands grew limp on Toffee's wrists as the darkness closed in swiftly and snuffed out the last glowing light of the quiet valley.

Then the wind caught them full force, and for a moment they swayed together under its sudden impact. Marc tried to get to his feet, but it was useless. Already, they were being lifted upward, shooting outward into space. Toffee's arms tightened around Marc's neck.

"Since you apologize," she whispered in his ear, "I forgive you."

Marc stirred and opened his eyes with an effort. Instantly, inside his head, a tin-pan symphony swung into a jangling rendition of "Hold That Tiger," and whaled it to a fare-thee-well. The universe seemed to rotate once, twice, and then skidded to a jittery stop and remained fixed. The discordant symphony became muted and distant. Marc discovered confusedly that he was in a sort of small shack-like structure. Bare boards with blinking knot holes stared back at him from an unlovely ceiling. Then an aged head blurred into sight, looking down at him with worried concern. It made a terrible clicking noise with its mouth and moved off to one side. Marc felt strengthless arms moving about his shoulders and with their negligible

help, boosted himself into a sitting position. The owner of the head, a little, worried-looking man, was crouching beside him.

"You come around pretty fast," he wheezed. "Ain't really been out no time at all. You had me scared at first, though. Thought maybe you was hurt bad."

MARC stared out a slit-like door that was directly in front of him. Beyond, a row of assorted automobiles testified to his whereabouts. His memory jogged back a bit and arrived successfully at the accident in the drive.

"How's my car?" he asked.

"Not so bad," the man replied. "Bumper's ripped off, and the radiator's not so fancy as she used to be, but it still runs good. I drove it around here to the shack for you. Want me to call a doctor?"

Marc got shakily to his feet and awaited results. His nose throbbed dully, but the rest of him seemed all right. "Never mind," he said. "I'm okay."

"Guess the steering gear smacked you in the nose," the little man observed mildly. "Guess I shoulda put that sign down on the street. Sorry."

Marc nodded curtly and went outside. The grey coupe was standing alongside the shack, looking a little crestfallen with its twisted bumper draped loosely over one crinkled fender. He stared at it unhappily.

Then he stiffened.

There was a movement inside the car and a brief flash of red.

"It's on fire!" he yelled.

"I do believe," the sign-hider collaborated calmly. "Maybe we should look."

Marc ran to the car, the little man ambling casually along in his wake. Then they both stopped short as the

red flash repeated itself at the window and was suddenly followed up with a puckish face. Toffee, her chin poised on the sill, peered out at Marc relievedly.

"I was wondering where you were," she said. "Thought maybe you'd been crumpled up on the floor. You really mashed things up, didn't you?"

"Oh, Lord!" Marc moaned. "Now I've got you on my hands!"

"It would be better," Toffee said insinuatingly, "if you had me in your arms."

At this point the little man shuffled over to Marc's side. "Well, I'll be!" he exclaimed. "I didn't see no woman in there before." He peered at Toffee nearsightedly. "You're one of them redheaded hussies, ain't you?"

"How did you know?" Toffee asked.

"Oughta know," the man said cryptically. "The old woman always blaspheming about redheaded hussies."

"What does she say?" Toffee asked interestedly.

"Couldn't repeat it," the little man said, "even to a hussy."

"Then you can believe every word of it," Toffee said. And opening the door, she stepped lightly out of the car.

The little man gasped at Toffee's faintly obscured charms. "Oh, lady!" he sighed. "The old lady didn't say nothin' about anything like that!"

By this time, Marc was already at Toffee's side. He reached inside the car and quickly drew out a rather unkempt fur coat. It was one of Julie's old ones that she used for driving in cold weather. Fortunately, no one had remembered to remove it from the car. He threw it unceremoniously around Toffee's shoulders.

"It would make a refreshing change," he said darkly, "if you showed up just once without being in a state

of indecent exposure."

"There are some," Toffee sneered, "who think this is one of the most decent exposures they've ever seen. And I'm inclined to agree with them."

MARC was in no mood to argue the point. He stared nervously at the inquisitive little man. "Let's get out of here," he said. "Accident or no accident I have to go to the bank."

As they left the little man behind and walked toward the sidewalk Marc poured out his troubles to Toffee. He told her of George's untimely reappearance and the unpleasant business at the bank. Mostly, though, he entered a stirring plea for her cooperation and good behavior. They had nearly reached the street when he suddenly stopped and raised a finger to his lips. A crunching noise sounded briefly on the gravel behind them, then stopped guiltily.

"What's that?" Toffee asked.

"Maybe nothing," Marc said. But he feared the worst.

Marc left Toffee just inside the bank entrance with firm instructions to remain where she was, to do nothing and say nothing until he returned. Also, he advised that she keep Julie's coat drawn tightly around her as certain misunderstandings were sure to arise if she did not. Toffee nodded and cooperated to the extent that she gave the appearance of a mute paralytic freezing in a snowstorm. The effect did not become her.

Upstairs, on the mezzanine, Marc made his way fearfully toward the president's office, a glass-fronted arrangement that overlooked the main floor of the bank like a guard tower in a concentration camp. As Marc approached, the president, looking up, caught sight of him and raced him to the door. The scene reminded Marc of a saber-

toothed shark he had once observed in an aquarium, pursuing a small unidentified fish with murderous intent. Pausing for a moment, he glanced wistfully down at Toffee standing by the door.

Then he turned quickly and ran to the rail.

Even from that distance the mark of horror was plain on Toffee's face. Marc followed her stricken gaze and came very close to screaming.

Downstairs, in the clerk's enclosure, a riot seemed to have broken loose behind the counters. At first glance it seemed the clerks were merely roughhousing among themselves, but a second look told an entirely different story. It was a scene that flagrantly thumbled its nose in the face of credulity, spat on the carpet of comprehension and sashayed out the door of sanity with an airy flip of the hip.

A pair of large money sacks, bearing the bank's name on their coarse sides, had plainly taken wing in a fit of convulsive madness. And whatever else these frightful sacks may have had on their minds, it was certain they possessed a boundless hatred for bank clerks. Progressing from the door leading into the vaults, they were savagely bludgeoning their way through the windowed enclosure, leaving a litter of prostrate figures and wilted white collars in their wake. The fugitive bags were making it emphatically clear that they would brook no nonsense from any faction desiring to frustrate them in their desire to be away from there. The current clientele of the bank was hastily arranging itself against the opposite wall.

One of the clerks, having miraculously escaped the ravages of battle, was streaking up the stairs to the mezzanine in a state of gibbering hysteria. Reaching Marc and the president who was now gasping at Marc's side, the

fellow slowed to a sliding stop and began visibly to wilt with terror. The president grabbed him quickly beneath the arms and held him away from the floor.

"What is it?" he yelled. "What's going on down there? Tell me!"

The clerk shivered in his employer's arms. "I . . . I don't know," he gasped. "I . . . I was down in the vaults . . . in the vaults . . . making up the payroll for the Reedley Chemical Works . . . and . . . and . . ." His voice trailed off into a shuddering whine. "It was aw-w-w-full!"

The president shook him energetically. "What happened?" he demanded. "Speak up, you ninny!"

THE clerk's eyes rolled loosely in their sockets, fell inadvertently on the scene below and darted away. "Those two sacks of money . . . they were behind me . . . they went crazy all of a sudden. They flew up into the air and started singing and carrying on something terrible! Then . . . then, they started out the door . . . well, I tried to stop them. At first I tried being nice about it . . . I tried to reason with them . . . and . . . and they *struck* me! And that isn't all! Those are the most foul-mouthed money bags in existence!"

The bank president promptly dropped the clerk to the floor. "The fellow's hysterical," he said. "It's a plot, a foul plot to rob this bank! Where are the police?" He stared over the rail and his question was promptly answered. The bank police, two of them, were trembling outside the enclosure, trying to nudge each other forward. "They practice the rhumba," he screamed, "while the bank is looted!"

At this point Marc left the president abruptly, vaulted over the collapsible

clerk and made his way to the stairs. Half way down the flight he paused and prepared to take the second half in one heroic leap. There was no question in his mind that his suspicion had borne the deadly fruit he had feared; George had indeed followed him to the bank. Now the soulless shade, in a burst of misguided boy-scoutishness, was blithely playing fast and loose with the Reedley Chemical Works' payroll.

Marc made his appearance on the scene of strife in a confused sprawl that was far from heroic. Then, he sat up, bewilderment written into every line of his face. Not until this moment had he stopped to consider the course that he was about to take. Clearly, to be seen in close association with those demented sacks would be to invite disaster. The implication would be entirely clear to everyone, especially to the irate bank president. The only safe procedure, then, was to stay clear of the whole affair and let the money bags shift for themselves, which they seemed to be doing with remarkable agility from the sound of things behind the enclosure. Then he started with shock as a hand fell to his shoulder. He glanced up to find Toffee standing beside him.

"Don't do that!" he fairly screamed. "Don't scare me like that!"

"I don't blame you for being jumpy," Toffee said. "At the moment I could easily vault a twelve story building by sheer nerve power. That's the most soul-shattering thing I've ever witnessed."

"Help me up," Marc begged. He extended a hand toward Toffee, then promptly leaped to his feet, unaided.

Victorious at last, the dashing bags suddenly emerged around the end of the clerk's enclosure and sailed through the hinged barrier like a pair of high-spirited, slightly drunken seagulls. At

the sight of them, the two policemen, who had finally managed to disengage their guns from their holsters, suddenly turned on each other in panic.

"Do something," one of them hissed. "Call a cop . . . I mean, yell at 'em to stop. Say halt or you'll shoot. That's always good."

The other fidgeted self-consciously. "I'd feel silly," he demurred. "You yell at 'em."

"I'd feel silly, too," the other admitted grudgingly. "Silly as hell." He gave the matter his thoughtful attention. "Tell you what," he said finally. "Let's just turn the other way and make out we don't see. It's nothing no human eyes should be gazing at anyway. It's indecent to say the least."

**SIMULTANEOUSLY**, the cops turned their broad backs on the fearful spectacle and pretended to engage each other in casual conversation. "Tell me," one of them was heard to say in a strained voice, "and how is that charming wife of yours? And those two darling children?"

This chatty arrangement, however, was not destined to endure. The president's voice rang down from the mezzanine with such a volley of scalding invective and personal criticism that the two reluctant officers decided it would be the lesser evil to face their duty and do it, even if their souls fried in hell as the result.

By now the flying bags had singled out Marc and Toffee and were headed toward them in an affectionate rush.

"Go way!" Marc yelled desperately. "Beat it!"

But the bags were not to be put off so easily. They continued forward, dancing through the air in a sort of bottom-heavy samba.

"Let's take steps!" Toffee cried. "Lots and fast! Let's get the hell out

of here before those fiendish bags put the finger on us!"

Physically, mentally and spiritually, Marc was in complete and utter accord with Toffee's suggestion. His whole being longed to its very depths to be away from those awful bags and the tailor-made life of crime that George so obviously meant to force upon him. Taking Toffee's arm he took as few steps as possible to the main entrance and swung the door open. Behind, the bags hesitated, seeming somewhat taken aback at this unfriendly gesture, then with a sort of shrug, started out in playful pursuit. The two policemen, their duties now engraved on their sluggish minds in letters of flame, joined the chase reluctantly.

Marc and Toffee headed instinctively toward the parking lot behind the bank, set on giving themselves every possible mechanical advantage in this mad race for respectability. Behind them, the bags steadily lost ground right from the start, probably because their weight held back their ghostly means of locomotion. Still further back, the two policemen, plugging along in their own flat-footed way, were hardly in the running at all.

Marc and Toffee reached the grey coupe at about the same instant and threw themselves on it like a couple of drowning sailors who had just sighted a lifeboat. In the midst of their frenzied activities the wizened attendant appeared at the door of the shack and watched with quiet interest.

"Wildest pair of young folks I ever seen," he murmured. "Leapin' around all over the place like they was crazy, in the head or somethin'. Nervous type I guess."

Unmindful of the attendant's concern over their hurried activities, Marc touched the starter and put the car into rapid motion. There was a sharp hiss

as the tires spit gravel into the air, and a second later a loud clatter announced the abandonment of the wrecked bumper.

But with the rapid exit of the grey coupe and its harried occupants, the little attendant's worries were destined to increase rather than diminish. No sooner did the car disappear down the drive than two bags, alarmingly on their own, flashed onto the scene and presented themselves before him in mid-air.

The little man looked at them, rubbed his eyes and looked again. For a long, tense moment he continued to stare at them. Then he turned about and stepped abruptly inside the shack, closing the door firmly behind him. He lowered himself into an ancient rocking chair, sighed deeply and closed his eyes.

"Keep a grip on yourself, you old fool," he muttered. "Sun spots ain't nothin' to get excited about. What if they do have People's Trust printed on 'em?"

**T**HE little man's grip on himself, however, might have slipped considerably had he remained outside to witness the subsequent movements of the "sun spots." Racing to a green sedan, they threw the door open and disappeared inside. A moment later the car, with no apparent aid, leaped from its place in line, grazed the fender of its neighbor, and went rolling swiftly down the drive.

As it was, two other grips were rudely pried loose by the incident. The two policemen, standing on the sidewalk, watched with horror-glazed eyes as the driverless sedan darted playfully toward them, then bounded over the curb and started in spirited pursuit of the grey coupe. To the one nearest the diabolical car this was not only the

last straw, but the whole final load of hay. He turned disillusioned eyes on his companion.

"That's done it," he said in a hollow voice. "After fifteen years on the Force I'm going down to headquarters and fling this badge of mine smack in the Chief's homely mush."

"You can't do that," his partner protested, fingering his own badge. "You'd be quitting in the face of duty."

"If that's the face of duty," the saddened law enforcer replied, "then it had better be lifted before it gets any worse. I'd rather be buddies with Frankenstein."

"We gotta at least make an effort," his friend reasoned. "After all, them sacks ain't armed. And maybe there'll be a reward for their capture."

This last thought seemed to put a fairer complexion on the face of duty. The two trudged to the center of the street and hailed a passing taxi.

"Follow that car," the more enterprising of the two growled, directing the driver's attention to the careening sedan three blocks distant. "And if you catch it, I'll have you stored in the pokey for the rest of your life."

In the grey coupe Marc was driving with a suicidal brilliance such as he had never before displayed. Some sainted sixth sense took him safely in and out and around cars at times when it seemed that sudden death would surely be the result. All the while, Toffee busied himself with the diverting task of observing and reporting the progress of their pursuers from the rear window. The green sedan appeared to be doing dishearteningly well, probably because of its driver's hair-raising disregard for any and all traffic laws. George, with a splendid lack of prejudice, was using both sides of the street indiscriminately. On the

other hand, the taxi wasn't faring nearly so well. Actually, it didn't seem to be really trying. According to Toffee's lights, it showed a distressing, sissy tendency to play strictly according to the rules.

Probably the only thing that prevented this lunatic chase from strewing the streets with death and tragedy was its early and untimely end. Allowed to continue to its ultimate conclusion, unrestrained, heaven only knows what madness might have ensued. The beginning of the end came swiftly when Marc cut the coupe screamingly through an alley and onto a side street.

Emerging from the alley, full speed ahead, he suddenly rocked the car to a jouncing stop that sent Toffee flying into his lap. Ahead and behind, the street was jammed to its curbs with automobiles of all descriptions, their horns bewailing their predicament in no uncertain terms. It was the worst traffic jam Marc had ever seen, and by some miraculous maneuver that even he, himself, couldn't believe, he had managed to wedge the grey coupe very nearly into its center.

From Marc's lap, Toffee reached slender arms toward his neck. "You impetuous boy," she giggled. "We love in the midst of danger."

Marc shoved her rudely back onto the seat. "We'll languish in the midst of Sing Sing, if we don't look out," he growled. "Where is that green sedan?"

Toffee peered out the window. "Good grief!" she cried. "It just pulled up in the alley. It's so close I could hit it with a pebble."

"Hit it with a bomb." Marc moved to Toffee's side just in time to witness the arrival of the cop-laden taxi behind the green sedan. The sight of the policemen was not reassuring; and neither was the sudden appearance of the

money bags, darting stealthily toward them from the door of the sedan.

"Trapped!" Marc groaned. "What'll we do?"

Of course, the only answer was flight. Opening the car door, Toffee tugged at Marc's sleeve. "Come on," she urged.

"Where to?" Marc asked hopelessly. "We're jammed in here tight. Bumper to bumper and fender to fender, so to speak."

"Sounds lecherous," Toffee murmured. "Come on."

MARC was willing to be led, it appeared, even when he didn't know where he was being led to. He didn't object even when Toffee blithely opened the rear door of the next car, nodded cheerfully to its startled owner, and bounded through to the other side. In fact, he heartily endorsed the idea by rapidly following suit.

And Marc was not the only one to realize the wisdom in Toffee's methods. Soon, not only the pursued, but the pursuers as well, were romping in and out of strange vehicles with a reckless abandon that indicated a decided taste for the sport. The sound of wailing horns slowly died to be replaced by excited screams and dark curses. Toffee, easily the most fleet of foot, took a fast lead, Marc bringing up a close second. The skittering money bags, an early entry in this car-hopping sweepstakes, followed hot on the trail, flitting felicitously past the noses of astonished motorists like a pair of featureless rag dolls suddenly come to life. The two policemen, definitely dark horses without a prayer, brought up a couple of blue serge rears that lent a certain full-bodied homeliness to the affair. The reactions of the jammed-in motorists were varied and extreme.

One dapper little gentleman, the

proprietor of a low black sedan, watched with bemusement as Toffee leaped lightly into his presence and made for the next car with business-like directness. But when Marc lunged after the lithesome redhead, the little fellow began to take an active interest in the proceedings, which, as he saw them, were becoming rather sordid. He held an arresting hand up to Marc.

"Why don't you let her go, mister?" he asked reprovingly. "You're running the poor kid nearly ragged. Maybe she just doesn't like you."

Marc brushed the hand impatiently aside and continued on his way.

The little man squared his shoulders manfully, slid across the seat and hopped quickly out the door.

"Maybe it isn't any of my business," he muttered, jumping to the running board of the next car, "but somebody's got to be there to protect that poor child when he catches her!"

The little man had no way of knowing that he was setting a dangerous precedent. Flinging one's self in and out of strange automobiles seemed to be just the sport that all America had been waiting for. Within only a few minutes after the beginning of the chase, the number of participants had increased by leaps, bounds and broad jumps. Clearly, there was an irresistible appeal about the thing that captured the imagination. With a why-didn't-I-ever-think-of-this gleam in their eyes people were soon leaping from car to car like a horde of salmon shooting the rapids at spawning time.

**T**HERE was, however, a dreary minority in the traffic jam that found certain aspects of this frolicsome pastime highly objectionable. One of this number, particularly, was Mrs. Priscilla Carthwright, a matron of some

standing who hadn't been known as "Prissy" during her girlhood for nothing. Mrs. Carthwright suffered an unconditional defeat, however, in her efforts to defend the sacred confines of her limousine from the ravages of the joyous herd. Crouched on ample knees on the seat of the car, she came dangerously close to falling into a swoon as the door burst open under her protesting, bejeweled hand, and a lank young man burst unconcernedly into her august presence with a broad wink and a primitive whoop that was strongly reminiscent of the cries of avenging Indians in the days of the early West. In the end, though, drawing on the waning reserves of her courage, Mrs. Carthwright managed to waylay one lean bespectacled reveler long enough to score her own little moral triumph.

"What does all this mean, young man?" she demanded imperiously. "Just where do all these people think they are going?"

The young man paused long enough to take the question under thoughtful consideration, obviously a matter that had heretofore not troubled him. "I think we're marching on Washington," he murmured finally, "to demand our rights."

"Just as I thought!" Mrs. Carthwright boomed triumphantly, dismissing her victim. "Communists!"

And having said, she settled back in the seat, cross-legged, her features fixed in a glassy stare that suggested haughty royalty in exile.

And there were other unfortunate incidents. Particularly bad was the one in which Toffee, completely innocent of purpose, threw the door open on a young couple locked in an amorous embrace. The lovers, looking up to find themselves observed by what appeared to be a surging sea of prying



eyes, came close to sharing an hysterical fit. The young lady, in a seizure of confused madness, turned on her adored one and dealt him such a stinging blow in the mouth that several of his front teeth were completely dislodged. Clearly, it was the death blow to a beautiful, if careless, romance.

More gratifying was Toffee's foray into a bus load of energetic young basketball players. Though the delighted redhead was relayed from seat to seat and finally lifted out of a rear window with all dispatch, when she waved good-bye to her instantly-won admirers, she was wearing a crimson sweat shirt with a golden N splashed across its front. Also, she had been unanimously elected the team's mascot in favor of an infant pig.

And so the racing procession continued, unabated, in limousine and out sedan, over jeep and under truck, for the better part of a quarter of an hour. And it might have continued longer had it not been for the enterprising spirit of a nearby restauranteer who rolled several kegs of beer onto the sidewalk thereby introducing into the occasion a further distraction. And since spontaneous entertainment is invariably the best, the wandering motorists were not long in realizing the inherent possibilities in this delightful turn of events. Other divertissements, including street dancing and a sidewalk performance by a theatrical troupe from a neighborhood burlesque, were quickly added to the program.

Never in the history of the city had the police been confronted by such an ungovernable, pleasure-bent traffic jam. After several futile attempts at laying down the fun-loving uprising, the Chief of Police and his aides finally accepted the inevitable, roped the area off from further traffic, and went in search of a cooling tumbler of beer. The Chief,

sitting democratically on the curb, bending his elbow with refreshing regularity, was a little worried, however. He wasn't at all sure how the Mayor was going to look on this incident, and tomorrow there would be the tiresome business of restoring abandoned vehicles to their subdued owners. For his own part, he didn't feel there was any harm in the thing. Here was a group of jaded, work-weary city dwellers having their first delightful taste of real, communal fun in a long time. After his fifth mug of beer, though, the Chief's worries began to vanish. He decided he didn't really give a damn what the Mayor thought.

TOFFEE and Marc, however, were not among those participating in these impromptu sidewalk festivities. They had resigned their charter membership in the reveling brotherhood some time before the beer rolled onto the scene.

Stylishly garbed in a fur coat and the flaming red jersey, which came nearly to her knees, Toffee burst onto the sidewalk from the door of a glittering convertible, looking a little like a grand dame who had recently suffered some extremely devastating losses in a cloak room crap game. Her face a bit flushed from her recent triumphs, she turned and waited expectantly for Marc. Soon, her vigil was rewarded. Marc, hatless, tieless, his hair hanging loosely in his eyes, staggered through the convertible and moved breathlessly to her side. His eyes were immediately drawn to the garish sweat shirt.

"Where on earth did you pick that up?" he asked with distaste.

"A charming group of youngsters gave it to me," Toffee told him proudly. "Also, they favored me with several choice bruises." She ran a hand gently

over her thigh. "Those kids sure know their way around."

Marc wasn't really interested in the precociousness of the younger generation. Not at a time like this. He glanced nervously over his shoulder. "Have you seen those ghoulish bags lately?"

Toffee shook her head. "I think we've given them the slip. The cops, too. The last time I saw those two flatheaded flatfoots they were slobbering all over each other like a couple of rejected brides. I really think they've lost their reason. One of them was mumbling something about hurling the Chief into the Mayor's face, whatever that means."

"Now what do we do?" Marc asked. "We're free, but we haven't a car any more."

Toffee crooked a slender finger. "Follow me," she said. "There is madness in this method. But it'll still work."

She led Marc around the block, back to the alley that had proved their one-way path to dilemma in the first place.

Marc hung back. "What's the idea?" he asked.

"The taxi," Toffee explained brightly. "The one the cops arrived in. It's the only transportation for miles that isn't all tied up. And it's just waiting for someone to come along and snag it."

Marc shrugged wearily and followed without protest as Toffee crossed to the driver's window and stuck her head inside.

"Is this car for hire?" she smiled.

The driver, an open-faced fellow of obvious good will, smiled back. "I'm supposed to be waitin' here for a couple of cops, lady," he said. "They said I wasn't to leave till they told me. They said . . ." Suddenly he broke off, his eyes focused on Toffee's fiery

red jersey. "Say! Ain't that one of Neopolitain High's sweat shirts you got on there?" Admiration grew in his face as Toffee nodded. "I gotta kid over at that school, lady. I bet you have too." Toffee maintained a discreet silence on this point. "Maybe you seen my kid play basketball sometime."

Toffee looked at the driver closely. "Is he a tow-headed little devil with searching blue eyes?" she asked.

"Could be, lady. Sounds like him. He's a real nice kid."

Toffee's answering laugh was brief and bitter, but the driver didn't notice. He was busy opening the rear door.

"Hop in!" he said grandly. "Anything for good old Neopolitain High!"

Climbing into the cab, Toffee rubbed her thigh reflectively. "Yeah," she murmured. "Anything."

MARC and Toffee collaborated on a deep, heart-felt sigh of relief as the taxi backed out of the alley and onto the street. They didn't know, however, that the breath they were expending with such satisfaction was soon to be reclaimed in a horrified gasp. This curious phenomenon occurred only a moment later when the taxi slowed to a stop at the corner signal.

They didn't see the sacks approaching; the fearful things were just there at their feet all of a sudden, having arrived with a sickening plop. The car door on Toffee's side swung open, and there was suddenly another depression in the seat. The door closed again just as the taxi pulled out toward the intersection. Apparently the driver hadn't noticed.

"Thought I'd never catch up with you two," George's voice said breathlessly and pleasantly. "It was all a lot of fun, of course, but a bit fatiguing, don't you think?"

With a soul-searing groan Marc

closed his eyes and sank deeper into the seat.

"Go strangle yourself," Toffee suggested waspishly.

But George's high spirits would not be quashed. "I really fixed things up, didn't I?" he asked proudly. The money bags leaped from the floor and deposited themselves in Marc's shrinking lap. "How's that, old man?"

Marc responded to this inquiry with a brief strangling noise. His face was turning crimson.

"What's the matter with him?" George asked. "Something disagree with him?"

"I think it's money poisoning," Toffee said dully.

"Well," George sighed, "now that I've set things right, I guess I might as well just relax and enjoy myself from now on. It's only four o'clock. That leaves me sixteen whole hours just to have fun. Until tomorrow noon. All's well that ends well, eh?"

Marc said a very singular and unprintable thing.

The driver turned and regarded Marc interestedly. "How come?" he asked. "You been blabbin' your head off and that's the first time you moved your lips. I been watchin' in the mirror. You a ventriloquist?"

"Yes," Toffee answered for Marc. "He throws his voice like crazy."

Apparently, the driver was not the sort to ask too many questions. He accepted the fact of Marc's voice tossing accomplishments on Toffee's say-so. And his attitude toward his customers instantly warmed. Confiding rather bashfully that he'd always thought of his own singing voice as something rather special, he burst into an unsolicited rendition of "Mexicali Rose" that had his helpless audience cringing in their seats. A truly ghastly moan issued from George's vicinity.

And it was a moan that Marc would certainly have echoed had he been able. He was wondering if a sort of plague of theatrical ambition had descended on all humanity. Thoughts of Julie and the imminent opening of "Love's Gone Winging" crept despairingly through his mind. He tried to console himself with the old bromide that things were always darkest before the dawn, but he couldn't help wondering where fate had stumbled onto this newer, darker shade of black and why the nights of misfortune had to be so interminably Alaskan.

Afterwards, it seemed to Marc that it was Toffee who suggested that they hide themselves in a movie theater. It seemed so, but Toffee stoutly denied it. But Marc's memory of that dark period was far too confused to be relied upon. Certainly, though, it was Toffee who invited the taxi driver along so that they might hide the money bags under the seat of the cab.

Once inside the theatre, it is doubtful that anyone, except Toffee saw much of the film, and that young lady, having never attended a movie previously, was far too engrossed in the activities on the screen to notice anything else. To her, the gigantic reflections of racing vehicles and exploding firearms were a terribly personal matter. Mostly, she concerned herself with repeated attempts to gain the doubtful protection of Marc's lap.

THE others of the party, though, were absorbed in other, more immediate problems . . . most of which stemmed from the dogged efforts of a bewildered usher to seat terrorized patrons in George's seat, which indeed appeared quite vacant. On these occasions the mouthings of the screen were rudely interrupted by startled cries of surprise and subsequent accu-

sations that usually involved Marc who was occupying the next seat. One spinsterish female, thus offended, summoned the usher and accused the cowering man of inflicting upon her unlovely person brutalities which included pinchings, proddings and other familiarities too terrible to mention. In a whisper, George vehemently denied these charges to Marc, but the die had already been cast, the usher had already threatened to call the manager if they didn't remove themselves from the premises at once.

Flushed from its retreat like a covey of reluctant quail, the party made its way silently back to the cab which was waiting in a nearby taxi stand. No one spoke to George of his misdemeanors, lest they stir in his perverse soul a rebelliousness and a will to even more awful achievements. Besides, it didn't seem that mere reprimand could possibly be enough. Apparently the taxi driver was used to being thrown out of theatres, for he seemed to find nothing untoward in this latest ejection. He seemed to take the affair of the offensive seat in his stride, too.

It was hunger that next drove the strange foursome from the semi-private confines of the taxi, and again it seemed to Marc, in retrospect, that Toffee was the one to set the project afoot.

His face a study in calamity, Marc followed his curious companions into an obscure diner with the lusterless resignation of a man who no longer gives a damn. Fully aware that the venture hadn't a Chinaman's chance for turning out well, he only hoped it would not fall into complete ruination before he at least had a chance to fortify himself with a cup of coffee.

The affair of the diner, however, all things considered, really turned out better than expected. Marc managed

to choke down not just one cup of coffee, but two, before disaster came storming over the horizon. It is perfectly true, of course, that George greedily and invisibly downed a milk shake while a counter boy, three waitresses and a handful of customers looked on with goggle-eyed fascination. Even the incurious taxi driver found this phenomenon somewhat diverting. He was not entirely certain in his own mind that long distance guzzling was a standard accomplishment in the bonafide ventriloquist's bag of tricks. In the end, he decided it probably was and looked on Marc with new respect. But there were others who gazed on the driver's new-found hero not so much with respect as disgust. Marc, for his part, pretended not to notice.

The main event, so to speak, patiently bided its time until Marc had downed the second cup of coffee. Then, on the stroke of the last drop, it commenced promptly and devastatingly. It will never be known exactly what George did to the waitress to make her so hostile, but the record definitely shows that the young woman, just passing George's stool bearing a platter of ham and eggs, suddenly jerked to a halt, turned beet red, wheeled and bestowed her messy burden squarely in Marc's face. This she followed up with a few observations on the type and dexterity of Marc's hands, which were uttered in round phrases, no cooler, in any noticeable degree, than the sizzling platter now resting on Marc's lap.

HERE, the situation reached the point at which it might have taken a course for either the better or worse, pending Marc's apology to the truculent waitress. But just as Marc opened his mouth, Toffee, smitten with the injustice of it all, gave the rail switches a deft twist and sent the whole issue

into a sharp decline. Lifting her water glass, in which several large cubes of ice were still afloat, she calmly and deftly reached out and poured the entire contents into the startled waitress's accommodating bodice.

It is to be supposed that a dining room brawl, at best, is bound to be an untidy business. The one that followed was hardly an exception. The employees of the diner, all accomplished hash slingers by profession, exerted every effort to prove their professional standing in a horribly literal way. What the good people lacked in cool headed aim, they made up for in sustained volume. The members of the Pillsworth party, not too ambitious, anyway, to be the victors in this war on foodstuffs, were quickly beaten into a disordered retreat. Running swiftly down the sidewalk toward the waiting taxi, their last glimpse of the enemy only caused them to redouble their efforts to be elsewhere. The counter boy and the waitresses, joined by a managerial reinforcement who had miraculously arrived on the scene in the midst of hostilities, were lined up on the sidewalk like a bespattered operatic chorus. In unison, and with gusto, they were calling for the law and horrible revenge. One of the waitresses, distinguished from the others by a spasmodic addition to quivering disturbances about the upper torso, was loudly describing the abysmal blackness of Toffee's future should she ever be permitted to arrange it.

After the skirmish in the diner, there followed a long ride in the country which might have been restful except for the persistent singing of the driver, whose favorite selection continued exasperatingly to be "Mexicali Rose." Through it all, Marc tried to assemble his thoughts, a task rather like trying to assemble a house of cards in a de-

railed streetcar. However, he did come to several definite conclusions. Out of the shambles that was now his life, there were two things that surely had to be salvaged. Those were his love for his wife and hers for him. Having those two ingredients with which to work he might be able to rebuild from the beginning again, providing, of course, that he did not become a permanent resident of the state penitentiary because of George's misbegotten helpfulness. Another conclusion concerned Julie's debut as a Broadway star and her certain failure as same. If Julie was to go down in humiliation, he would be there to help cushion the fall, no matter what the consequences might turn out to be.

Thus, Marc's conclusions determining their course, darkness found the taxi and its odd crew heading warily back toward the city and the Hamilton Theatre. They traveled quietly through side streets and alleys, displaying a noticeable reticence in the vicinity of bright lights and police cars. Besmirched both in character and person, the fugitives ordered their movements in concurrence with their recently lowered social status.

Marc's hope that he might be able to make his entrance into the theatre unaccompanied proved nothing more than an empty dream. The taxi driver, Toffee and the stealthy scuffling noise that was George pressed close behind him as he identified himself to the doorman backstage and went inside. Toffee had decided that the money should be carried inside the theatre for purposes of security and elected to smuggle it in under her coat. Unfortunately, with the bags stowed around her middle, the little redhead looked curiously like a very unconcerned young lady in a very delicate condition. It was an extremely unhappy arrangement.

MARC had forgotten the backstage policeman, a regular fixture in the theatre. And now that he did remember him there wasn't much that could be done about it. Standing just inside the door, the cop turned inquisitive eyes on the newcomers and started forward. As the law approached, however, the little company retreated in kind toward a shadowed area beyond several frames of scenery. They were about mid-way to this retreat when Toffee, in her haste, relaxed the hold on her coat and one of the money bags dropped to the floor with a sickening thud.

For a moment the little group stopped, transfixed in a horrified tableau, then in unison, they all became wildly animated in an attempt to retrieve the wayward pouch and return it to the place from whence it had come. By the time the policeman had drawn close enough to see what was going on, these activities were in full cry. The man of law stopped short with a startled gasp. Just why these demented people should be clutching so furiously at this woman's stomach was beyond him.

"Here, you!" he called out. "Stop that!"

The trio looked up with matching expressions of fright and guilt. All hands, except Toffee's suddenly abandoned ship. Toffee, left to shift for herself, bent forward in a sort of agonized, doubled-up position.

The policeman drew closer for a second look, and, getting it, instantly clamped his eyes shut, his features crowding together in a look of pain. The glimpse he'd had of Toffee's mid-section had twisted his very soul. When he opened his eyes again he was careful that their gaze fell no lower than the girl's chin.

"I don't understand it, lady," he

said. "What seems to be the trouble?"

Toffee flushed a deep red. "I . . . I don't know, officer," she said demurely. "It just came over me all of a sudden. It's terribly embarrassing."

"I can imagine," the policeman said shortly. "If I were you, I'd be throwin' fits all over the place."

"If you were me," Toffee observed reasonably, "you'd be entitled to every fit you throw. I shouldn't think a few convulsions would go amiss, either."

This didn't rest well with the policeman and as much as was registered in a disapproving scowl. "You come with me," he said sternly. "We'll find a place for you to lie down and rest a bit."

Toffee darted entreating glances to her companions, but when she received no response from either quarter, she resignedly hugged the bulging coat to her and hobbled forward in a tortured half-squat.

But the policeman didn't leave immediately. Instead, he lingered long enough to favor Marc with a long and searching glance, a glance that clearly implied an unusual interest in Marc's face. Marc didn't like the look of it. Plainly, it was the manifestation of a methodical mind that was moving methodically toward a memory that Marc feared would not be to his advantage.

All this was accomplished to a musical accompaniment that issued from the general direction of the stage. When the policeman and Toffee had gone, Marc moved quickly toward the wings.

Left with nothing else to do, the little taxi driver followed Marc, filled with the wonder of it all. It was his own impression that he had fallen in with people of true greatness. Show people. He was not concerned over the curious presence of the money bags. These

folks were clearly artists given to eccentric practices in all matters . . . including those of money. If they chose to carry their loose cash about in a couple of official bank sacks, why, who was he to ask questions? It was enough that they suffered him to remain in their wonderful company. The little fellow clamped the gift horse's mouth tightly shut and looked blankly in the opposite direction.

ON THE stage a whole regiment of very remarkable chorus girls were doggedly stomping their way through a lot of expensive scenery in pursuit of a dance routine that seemed hardly worth the effort. Marc's gaze darted beyond the girls to the other side of the stage, and his heart suddenly lifted, then shortly after, scraped against his shin on its way south of his instep. Julie, apparently awaiting a cue in the opposite wings, stared back at him wretchedly, her face too filled with fright to have room for recognition. The miracle that was needed to pull her through to success obviously hadn't come to pass.

At Marc's side, this impression was being vigorously corroborated by two diminutive bit actresses, chummily exchanging job tips to be looked into first thing in the morning.

"Too bad Linda Godfrey isn't in that dame's shoes," one of them commented sadly. "We wouldn't have to beat the pavement for the next two years."

"Yeah," the other agreed. "You know, this show was really written with Godfrey in mind. I heard the author say so himself, the other night. The poor guy was ready to hang himself when he saw La Pillsworth murdering all his best numbers."

"I hear this Pillsworth put up enough cash to steal the show from under Godfrey," the other replied.

"Bet it cost him about a dozen solid gold fortunes. Money still talks, I guess."

"Too bad it doesn't sing, too. This show could use some good singing."

"Oh, I don't know. The dame's got a nice little voice when you come right down to it."

"I don't think the audience is going to get that far down, though. Anyway, that's just the trouble with her voice, it's too nice and too little. What this show needs is a big dirty voice with lots of guts. Like Godfrey's."

Marc edged away, too saddened by what he'd heard to listen to any more. Out on the stage the chorus had ceased to stalk the scenery and Julie, looking terribly alone and lonely, was moving uncertainly before the footlights. Marc felt his heart head south again as her nice little voice began to quaver over the words of a musical cynicism called "Love is a Clop in the Chops." The words of the song to the contrary, she looked and sounded like a very small girl singing in a church choir. Her lovely blondness seemed suddenly dulled and all the natural animation was drained from her blue eyes. The audience was starkly unresponsive.

Marc watched his wife's performance as long as was bearable, then turned away. He wondered how he would ever manage to say the right thing to her when it was all over. The taxi driver, however, still in the wings, seemed completely enthralled by what he saw. Marc only wished there were a thousand more of his benighted kind in the audience. Somewhere backstage a chorus girl yipped, turned about, and slapped the nearest male within reach. Apparently, George was also enjoying himself.

Marc was still deep in thought when the policeman suddenly bore down on him.

"You're Marc Pillsworth, ain't you?" the cop asked.

Marc nodded absently, and, before he thought, murmured, "Yes."

"I thought so!" the cop said triumphantly. "I was cautioned to look out for you around here. But I didn't have anything to go by except a picture in your wife's dressing room. I think the Chief might be interested in seeing you about a little bank robbery."

Marc started to back away. He'd been taken completely by surprise.

**B**UT, at that moment, Marc was not the only surprised person in the theatre. Many an eyebrow was being simultaneously hoisted out in the audience. The chorus, having accomplished a brief change of costume, had returned to the stage, their number mysteriously increased by one. At the very end of the line a blazing redhead dressed in a seedy fur coat and a red jersey ambled calmly onto the scene, two large sacks and a whisp of filmy grey material clutched tightly in her arms. Moving quickly before a mirror that was part of the scenery, this new performer proceeded serenely about the intimate business of removing the coat and shirt, and wriggling into a light grey dress that was obstinately uncooperative. Slowly, her efforts became more and more vigorous and, from the audience's point of view, more and more exciting. This gaudy newcomer was doing a dance they hadn't seen since the days of Little Egypt, and doing it surpassingly well. In her efforts to get into the dress, she was putting her provocative anatomy through a series of gyrations and contortions that seemed beyond the limitations of mere flesh and blood. Also, to some, they seemed to outdistance the limits of ordinary decency as well.

Julie, unaware of the performance in

progress behind her, misunderstood the sudden enthusiasm of the audience. She thought they had at last caught on to her subtle style of singing and were showing their appreciation. Then, turning ever so slightly, she learned, from the corner of her eye, the awful truth. At the sight of the wriggling redhead, she stopped in the middle of her song and succumbed to a tremor of rage. She didn't know who this interloper was, but she did know the stage wasn't big enough to hold the two of them. Clenching her fists, she started toward center stage and the squirming dervish in the grey dress.

A chorus girl, seeing that events were coming to a head, danced close to Toffee.

"Better put up your guard, honey," she whispered. "Here comes the star with blood in her eye."

Toffee's round eyes peered out at the girl through a chiffon fog. "What's she so upset about?" she asked innocently.

"In case you haven't heard," the girl hissed, "what you're doing is called upstaging. Honestly, you didn't think you'd get away with it, did you? In a way I'm not going to blame that Pillsworth dame when she strangles you."

"Stage!" Toffee shrieked. "Isn't this the ladies' lounge? I saw all you girls coming in here, all undressed and everything, and I . . . ! Oh, my gosh!"

Meanwhile, backstage, Marc was too busy watching his own troubles mount to notice Toffee's predicament.

"Also, Mr. Pillsworth," the policeman was saying with maddening deliberation, "there is a certain restaurant owner that would like to have words with you. Do you want to come along quietly, or shall we mix it up a little first?"

"Oh, no," Marc moaned. "Not now, officer. Can't you put all this aside for



just a bit?"

The officer shook his head and grinned nastily at the sudden flash of fear in Marc's eyes. Had he known, however, the cause of Marc's fear, he might have been less flattered by it. Behind him a steel framed folding chair was floating swiftly upward, poising itself carefully over his head.

"No!" Marc yelled. "No!"

"It's nothing to get hysterical about," the cop laughed. "We'll treat you right. . . ."

Marc started to yell again but his words were drowned out as the wooden bottom of the chair splintered noisily over the policeman's head. A moment later the policeman tumbled to the floor, rolled over once, and then began to slither weirdly, feet first, toward the darkness beyond a nearby screen of drapes.

"No, George!" Marc yelled. "Don't drag him away! Get him some water!"

George's voice echoed back from the vicinity of the policeman's ankles. "I guess I turned up just in time, eh?"

MARC rattled off a list of words that will never be found in any dictionary. Then he started forward. It was a mistake that, in his anger, he leaped. His foot became ensnared in the wreckage of the shattered chair, and he shot head-first into space. He came down heavily against the floor, rolled partly over on his back, grinned foolishly, and lay still.

It was precisely at this moment that Julie drew abreast of the struggling redhead out on the stage.

"I'll lay you out so stiff," she grated, "people will think you're a pool cue!"

She reached out a slender, red-taloned hand and clutched a handful of grey chiffon. There was a sudden ripping sound, and then it happened. The redhead, dress and all, instantly van-

ished into thin air. Julie drew back with a startled cry.

The explanation of Toffee's disappearance was simple. Since she was projected into the world of reality only through Marc's full consciousness, the blow that had temporarily put an end to Marc's activities had simultaneously snuffed out Toffee's earthly existence.

To the audience, though, it was a matter of even greater simplicity. The vanishing girl was merely an excellent stage effect, excellently executed, and they applauded it with bountiful enthusiasm. They were still applauding when the curtain swung together to hide the confusion that followed.

Behind the scenes, George was briskly brushing the dust of the law from his hands as he returned to the wings where Marc still slumbered. Just why the ghost had chosen this particular moment to expend a portion of his limited ectoplasm on materialization was never quite clear; perhaps it had somehow aided him in his labors with the prostrated minion of the law. At any rate he strode, a full figure of a man, as it were, from the shadows, just as Julie emerged from the stage, the picture of pent-up rage. It was unfortunate that the paths of these two beings were fated to cross at this particular moment. Julie regarded the replica of her husband as a frost might look on a blossoming violet just prior to administering the chilly sting of death.

"You!" she seethed, unreason glowing in her eyes. "You were behind all that, Marc Pillsworth!" She gestured angrily toward the stage. "I feel it in my bones."

"I don't doubt it," George said amiably, a bit bewildered. "That dress you have on is terribly thin, isn't it?"

The barometer of Julie's control reg-

istered DANGER just before she struck George squarely on the chin. It was a blow that any professional might have been proud of. And it caused a curious sort of short-circuiting reaction in George. At the precise moment of contact, he vanished completely.

Julie stepped back, aghast. According to her tastes, this sort of thing was happening all too consistently. Then her eyes darted to Marc's hitherto unnoticed form, still crumbled some yards distant.

"Oh, my heavens!" she gasped. "I knocked him clear across the stage!"

At first she started contritely forward, then suddenly she stopped. "Serves him right," she said self-righteously.

"On stage!" a voice yelled, and Julie whirled about. A call boy was hurrying toward her. "Curtain going up on the second scene, Mrs. Pillsworth," he said. "You're supposed to be on."

Julie squared her lovely shoulders, took a deep breath, and started regally stageward. A moment later her voice rang out with a certain deadly sincerity in a song called, "I Wouldn't Give a Dime For the Ten Best Men in Town."

MEANWHILE, Toffee, finding herself suddenly rematerialized, gathered up the money bags and the fur coat from a piece of scenery which was now thankfully hidden from the eyes of the audience and started in search of Marc. The redhead was now entirely clothed in the filmy grey dress that had proved the making of her theatrical success. When she found Marc he was sitting up, shaking his head. He looked at her blankly for a moment, then leaped to his feet.

"We've got to get out of here," he said. "George slugged the cop. Incidentally, where is that fiend?"

The fiend obligingly appeared, lengthwise on the floor, looking singularly unfiendish. He was a trifle fuzzy about the extremities, perhaps, but he was all there. He sat up and stroked his chin gingerly.

"Boy, that dame packs a wallop," he said unhappily.

"So justice has finally prevailed," Toffee said with satisfaction. "One of them finally nailed the right guy. And high time, too, if you ask me."

"And speaking of justice," Marc said evenly. "You have a little duty to perform, George." He removed the money bags from Toffee's arms and thrust them ungently into George's lap. "You're going to return those hellish things," he continued. "Slugging that cop was the last straw. I've had enough!"

"But I was only trying to help," George said.

Something snapped somewhere in the depths of Marc's forgiving soul. "You say that once more," he yelled, "and I'll belt you one myself!"

Hugging the bags to him, George stood up. "But the bank's closed," he said hopefully. "I can't take them back tonight."

"You'll take them back tonight, all right," Marc said with quiet intensity, "before the police find us with them. You were so smart about getting them out, now you can just dream up a way to get them back in."

The bank building loomed darkly as the taxi eased up to the curb and discharged three silent figures onto the sidewalk. Silhouetted against the glow of a distant street lamp, the figures moved forward with obvious conspiratorial intent. The first, burdened with two ominous-looking lumps of darkness, tried to hang back, and was rudely shoved forward by the other two for his efforts.

"Get those things back inside," Marc hissed, "and be snappy about it. There might be a night watchman around."

George remained unenthusiastic. "Even if I manage to fade myself through the wall," he protested, "I'll never be able to take these sacks with me. You're asking for miracles." But as Marc advanced threateningly, he started forward. "All right," he mumbled, "I'll think of something."

Marc and Toffee peered into the darkness after George as he proceeded toward the bank and finally reappeared, in silhouette again, against one of the bank's huge plate glass windows, which was dimly illuminated by a night light somewhere inside.

George seemed to hover uncertainly before the window for a time, then he bent down and seemed to take an intense interest in a trash container standing nearby. Finally he straightened up, fumbling with the bags.

"What's he doing?" Toffee asked. "He wouldn't have the nerve to pocket that money, would he?"

"I don't know," Marc replied. "He seems more to be putting something into the sacks. Rocks or something." Then he stiffened as George's motives suddenly became hideously clear. "No!" he yelled. "Don't, you fool!"

But it was too late. Already, George had swung the sacks over his head and hurled them at the window. Marc's cry rang out just as they completed their grisly mission. A horrible crashing sound was instantly followed by a loud clamor of bells, the bank's burglar alarm was heralding the awful news with a din that froze Marc and Toffee in their tracks. For one panicky moment their blood seemed to stand still in their veins.

milling figures, most of which had a nasty, official-looking cut to them. They swarmed down on Marc and Toffee, forcing them back toward the taxi, which promptly streaked away from the curb, withdrawing its sanctuary. Apparently, the little driver had at last begun to see his new-found friends in a different light . . . a prison grey, for instance. Marc and Toffee were promptly surrounded.

"We got two of 'em!" a voice yelled. "You get the other one?"

"No!" another voice answered bewilderedly. "We thought we had him but he got away somehow. Darned if I can figure out how he did it. One minute he was right here in our hands, next minute he was gone. He's a slippery rat, that one." A dull whack interrupted the voice briefly. "Ouch!" it continued. "Which one of you wise guys slugged me in the nose?"

There ensued a whole series of whacking sounds, followed by accusations, counter-accusations and athletic retaliations. Departmental jealousies and prejudices suddenly flared into the open, and the result was a sort of policemen's brawl. Later, one of the participants was heard to proclaim, whilst nursing a black eye, that he had seen a disembodied fist flying about delivering blows willy-nilly in all directions, without any noticeable favoritism to any of the various contestants. For his very accurate reportorial work, the fellow was quickly hustled off to the police psychiatrist.

George's little ruse, however, did not have the desired effect. Before the fight had effectively gotten under way, Marc and Toffee were rushed off to a police car that had screamed onto the scene with depressing promptness.

Stepping into the car, Toffee nodded toward the field of battle. "George is still helping," she observed bitterly.

**AS THOUGH** by magic, the scene was suddenly filled with bounding,

"I'd like to help *him*," Marc replied dully. "I'd like to help him right through the gates of Hell."

Justice Harvey was a bear with a gavel, and he was proud because of it. With only the most delicate twist of the wrist, he could produce a resounding smack that rivaled even the awesome clatter of heavenly thunder. When the good Justice laid gavel to stand, men, women, children and morons sat up and silently searched their souls. Promptly at eleven o'clock, A. M., the Justice displayed his talent with an even greater finesse than was common. The crowded courtroom became silent, and all eyes turned hopefully to the bench.

Most of those in attendance, being either complainants or voluntary witnesses, were present in the interests in seeing a terrible justice done as speedily as possible. Many a face was alight with the fanatical gleam of vengeance.

The Justice cast a hawk-like eye toward a nearby official. "Let the crim . . . the prisoner . . . be brought before the bar," he proclaimed.

The official hurried importantly to a distant door and made quite a show of throwing it open. Marc, in the company of an iron-faced guard, was rudely revealed to the court, looking rather like a modest maiden lady who had been surprised in her bath. He gazed on the courtroom with an expression of embarrassment and fearful expectancy. Then he shuddered as his gaze was returned coldly by an assemblage that included the faces of such hostile personages as the bank president, the owner of the ravaged diner, the counter boy and the three waitresses. Also, among many others, there was a sprinkling of bank clerks and policemen whose features seemed not altogether unfamiliar. Marc glanced studiously at the floor as, with lagging step, he

followed the official to a position of frightening prominence before the bench. A moment later, he was joined by Toffee, in the custody of a grim-looking matron.

TOFFEE nudged Marc. "I'm your accomplice," she said pridefully. "They say you used me for a lure."

But Marc didn't respond; he was far too fascinated by the disgusting sight of the Justice, rattling through a noisy throat-clearing operation. When it was over, the formidable servant of the public peered down at him maliciously.

"Prisoner," he thundered, "You are to be congratulated!"

"Thank you, your Honor," Marc said confusedly.

The gavel barked against the stand. "The prisoner will be silent until requested to speak," the Justice reproved. "As I was saying, you are to be congratulated. In a single day you seem to have established a criminal record that would ordinarily take a hardened thug a full year to achieve. The list of your wrongdoings is so extensive that frankly I can hardly bring myself to believe it. Virtually single-handed you have perpetrated a crime wave the like of which has not been seen in this city for the past thirty years."

"Single-handed!" Toffee snorted, injured at being relegated to a role of insulting minority. "I like that!"

The Justice fixed Toffee with a steady eye. "The court is all too well aware of your part in all this, young lady," he said. "I can only say that a girl who would allow herself to be used as a foil for innocent citizens . . . who would lend her charms to the perpetrator . . ."

"Oh, go on," Toffee broke in, pleased at having gained so much attention. "Flattery will get you almost

any place with me."

The gavel performed new wonders. For a time the Justice seemed to fall into a painful lethargy. When he finally roused himself, he directed his gaze carefully at Marc.

"To continue," he said in a controlled voice, "the list of your crimes has seldom been equalled. Just for a sample, I will read off a few of the more outstanding ones. At the top of the list is a bank robbery. There is some confusion surrounding the methods used in the performance of this deed, but we are sure you will choose to explain everything at the proper time. After that, in rapid succession, there are a dozen charges of assault and battery, one of inciting to riot, two of resisting arrest, two of destruction of private property, seven of traffic violation, and one of attempted breaking and entering. The other, miscellaneous charges of improper conduct and ordinary misdemeanor seem hardly worth mentioning after all that."

This last comment provoked a brief bristling disturbance in the ranks of the complainants, most noticeable in the vicinity of the waitresses. Marc glanced toward them and quickly averted his eyes.

"Do you have a statement to make?" the Justice boomed. "Can you deny these charges?"

"Of course he can," Toffee said blandly. "He's as innocent as a newborn emu."

Toffee's careless choice of similes shocked the Justice to the extent that he forgot his resolve to ignore her. "Emu?" he asked disapprovingly. "Don't you mean a newborn babe?"

"If I'd meant babe, I'd have said babe," Toffee replied tartly. "Why should a babe be any more innocent than an emu?"

"I don't know," the Justice replied,

thoroughly mixed up. "I don't even know what an emu is. A babe just seemed more appropriate, that's all."

"Just as I thought!" Toffee snapped triumphantly. "You're not fit to sit on the bench. You're prejudiced. Practically babe-crazed, too."

FOR one fearful second the gavel poised itself in mid-air, then it descended slowly, tremblingly to its stand, making only a faint clattering sound. The Justice's eyes roved aimlessly around the courtroom for a moment, then darted to Marc.

"Why do you let her go on like that?" he asked. "She's not making things any better for you, you know. Why don't you stop her?"

"Could you?" Marc asked hopefully.

The Justice cleared his throat and scowled. "That's neither here nor there," he said gruffly. "You were about to answer to the charges. The court wishes to know if you consider yourself guilty or not guilty."

"Will it make any difference?" Marc asked recklessly.

"Primarily," the Justice went on, "The court wishes an answer to the charge of robbery. The court knows that the money was returned in a highly informal manner, but finds no reason for leniency in this circumstance. I advise you to consider your answer carefully. The consequences will be very serious when . . . if . . . you are proven guilty, let me assure you. Now, answer the court with a simple statement of guilty or not not guilty. It will not be necessary to elaborate."

"Not guilty," Marc said desperately. "I didn't do any of those things. It . . . it was someone else."

"Someone else?" the Justice laughed nastily. "Let me tell you, Mr. Pillsworth, these infantile attempts at evasion will not avail you . . ."

"He is too guilty!" a voice suddenly rang out from the direction of the complainants. "He's as guilty as original sin!"

"He is not!" Toffee yelled back. She jerked back as the matron held out a restraining hand. "Get your claws off me, you lumpy old trull!"

The gavel danced a thunderous jig against its stand. "That's enough of these emotional outbursts!" the Justice hollered distractedly. "Any further demonstration, and the courtroom will be cleared." He turned a reproofing eye on the matron. "Please keep the prisoner quiet," he said. "If need be, stuff a fist down her garrulous throat."

The matron nodded with a splendid show of willingness to duty. Clearly, from now on, she was only waiting her chance.

Once again the Justice turned doggedly toward Marc. "I advise you not to persist in this foolish assertion that someone other than yourself performed this list of crimes. The court is fairly jammed to the rafters with witnesses who will testify to the contrary. Can you still make such a claim in the face of all that?"

"I can," Marc said gravely. "And I do. It was someone else."

The Justice frowned impatiently. "I suppose," he said, "you are prepared to give the court a full description, if not the actual name, of this mysterious villain?"

"It was George," Toffee put in quickly.

"You shut up," the Justice said rudely, forgetting his poise.

Toffee cast the matron a murderous glance that quickly forestalled any action from that quarter. Then she turned back to the Justice. "I'm here to see that Marc gets a fair trial," she said primly.

The Justice chose to deal with Marc. "Perhaps you could tell the court what the young lady is talking about? Perhaps you can identify this George person that she alludes to?"

"Why, yes," Marc said quietly. "The young lady is right. It was George who did it all. He's a . . . a . . ." He couldn't bring himself to say the word.

"He's lying!" The bank president was suddenly on his feet. "I saw him with my own two eyes. I don't know how he did it, but that money followed him right out the door of my bank. I'll never forget it."

THE banker's cry was the spark that touched off the bonfire. Suddenly, the witnesses and complainants were on their feet in a body, crying out against Marc. Some screamed their willingness to swear in any court in the land, and promptly proved their overwhelming ability to do so in phraseology that was strikingly illegal. Through the hub-bub, the Justice's gavel made riveting gun noises to no avail. The court had suddenly become an echoing cavern filled with a multitude of voices, all crying out for retribution. The scene was one of such hysteria that no one noticed the courtroom door sliding stealthily open and closed again, apparently of its own free will.

Before the enraged Justice, Marc began to sway slightly, all but leaning against the bench for support. He passed an unsteady hand over a forehead that was throbbing dreadfully. This was unquestionably the end. His doom was being swiftly sealed by a master craftsman called Fate, and there was nothing he could do to save himself. Worst of all, he was being taken away from Julie just at the time when she needed him most. He won-

Justice Harvey pounded his gavel noisily as he pointed an accusing finger at George and bellowed: "How did he get into this court?"



dered feverishly why they didn't just lynch him and get it over with.

Even through the calamitous events of the previous day he had managed to bolster his spirits with the notion that everything would somehow clear itself up when the time came, but now he realized that he had only indulged in wishful thinking. Now, he just wanted to have done with it all. Compared to this yowling courtroom, a nice quiet cell seemed a haven of unblemished loveliness. He glanced behind him and shuddered. He seemed to be surrounded by a wall of accusing, pointing fingers.

Then he blinked and turned about. There appeared to be a curious divergence in the direction of the pointing fingers. Most of them, it was perfectly true, were pointing at him, but a few indicated a region far to the right. And even as he watched, others began to waiver from him and move uncertainly away. Then, a great collective gasp scraped through the room, and was followed by a charged silence. Marc stepped forward and immediately echoed the gasp. George, fully materialized and smiling, was leaning nonchalantly against the right hand wall.

Casually smoking a cigarette, at the sight of Marc, the spirit plucked the smouldering cylinder from his lips and tossed it to the courtroom floor.

Marc's eyes promptly sought the face of the Justice. It was a grave mistake. The Justice's face, never a thing of beauty, was now an item of extreme repugnance. More than a human face, it looked like an ugly, mottled sponge that had been squeezed dry. The Justice's lips, a fierce blue color, were working at odds with each other in an attempt to say something that was probably better left unsaid.

One of the waitresses broke the spell with a shrill, hysterical giggle.

"Oh, my God!" she jabbered. "Now there's two of them!"

This accurate statement of matters seemed to steady the Justice's nerves somewhat. "How . . . how did you get in here, may I ask?" he demanded.

George boosted himself away from the wall and sauntered indolently toward the bar. "None of your fat-necked henchmen dragged me in," he said.

The Justice's gavel wavered uncertainly a moment, then remained at rest. The Justice regarded it dolefully. Somehow, in the last few minutes it had lost some of its appeal.

"As someone seems to have remarked," the Justice observed sadly, "we now have two of them." He sighed deeply. "Will someone volunteer to tell the court which is which?"

"It's a trick!" the bank president yelled. "We have the one that was arrested in front of my bank." He pointed to Marc. "That's the one we want!"

THE crowd seemed inclined to agree. Marc, so far, had provided them with a splendid target for their injured feelings, and they were loath to give him up . . . even for a replacement that was like him in every detail. Besides, this newcomer seemed the type that would fight back.

"But," the Justice put in wearily, "there appears to be a margin of doubt in this whole business . . . a mighty wide margin, too. The court must be fair. A positive identification must be established." He pinched the ridge of his nose for a moment, then glanced up hopefully. "Can anyone here point to either of these men and state positively that he is the miscreant?"

"I can!"

All eyes turned to one of the waitresses as she started forward. It was



the young lady who had suffered the water cure at the hands of Toffee. She placed herself stolidly before the bar, sneered briefly at Toffee, then pointed to Marc.

"That's the one," she said positively. "That silly map of his is stenciled on my memory for the rest of my life. I saw it in a nightmare last night. There's something funny about his eyes, too. No mistake, your Honor. That's the bird that did the mischief."

"You lie in your nasty bucked teeth!" Toffee rasped.

The girl whirled on Toffee, her body tense with anger. "You keep your phony two-bits worth outa this, or I'll tell his Honor what you did. I'll never be right again because of you!"

At this his Honor seemed to pick up his ears. Here was a note of intrigue worthy of his personal attention.

"What did she do?" he asked in a hushed voice.

The girl beckoned with a stained finger and the Justice obligingly leaned down over the bench. Lip-to-ear, the waitress whispered at length, and as the narrative progressed the Justice's mouth formed a scandalized O.

"All the way down?" he asked when she had finished.

The girl nodded vigorously. "And it made me feel all . . ."

The Justice suddenly seemed to remember that he was presiding over a court rather than a ladies' tea. His features fixed themselves into an expression of severity. "I'm not sure you should divulge confidences of such a personal nature, young lady," he said, straightening up. "However, I can see your complaint."

"Anyone can see her complaint," Toffee commented dryly. "I guess she was just born that way."

"Silence!" the Justice snapped. "And besides, this sort of thing doesn't

really get us anywhere." He turned to the waitress. "You're certain this is the man, are you? No doubt in your mind whatsoever?"

"None."

"She's lying!" Toffee cried. "How *can* she be sure? They're just alike."

"Sure," George put in. "How can she be when *I'm* not so sure which of us is which. Maybe I am really he, for all I know."

"Eh?" The Justice's eyebrows seemed about to leave his face. "How's that?"

"I propose a test for the witness," George continued. "If you want a positive identification from her, why don't you let the two of us go out of the room for a moment, then return. If she can successfully pick out this gentleman over here, then we'll have to accept her testimony."

A look of deep confusion passed over the Justice's face. He turned to the waitress. "Is that a good idea?" he asked. "I'm so mixed up, I can't tell."

"Sure," the girl said. "Let 'em go. I'll pick out the right mug the minute they step through the door."

NEVERTHELESS, something about the arrangement seemed to bother the Justice as Marc and George quickly removed themselves from the room. The minute the door closed after them, it struck him.

"Oh, my Lord!" he murmured. "Now we may never know which is which if that new one decides to double cross me. We may not even be able to tell which one was arrested outside the bank last night." He looked worriedly at the waitress. "The court's integrity is resting on you, my dear," he said.

"The court's integrity," Toffee put in, "is in one hell of a spot, in that case."

The corridor door swung open and Marc and George smilingly reappeared. Side by side, they presented themselves before the girl.

"Go ahead," the Justice urged. "Pick out the right man. Don't be nervous."

"Sure, your Honor." The girl winked broadly at her sisters-in-arms on the sidelines. "It's a cinch." She turned to the two men standing before her. Her hand went promptly toward the one on the right, and she looked back at the Justice. "That's the one, your . . ." Suddenly her voice faltered and trailed away into silence. She turned back to the men and her eyes darted crazily back and forth, from face to face.

"Oh, murder!" she murmured miserably. "They *are* both alike! They both even have that dirty-minded look in their eyes." For a moment she gazed up at the Justice entreatingly, and slowly began to tremble under his venomous glare. Then, all in a rush, she turned and fled to her companions from the diner. Collapsing into their outstretched arms, she began to sob loudly.

Once more a bleak stillness gripped the courtroom. Everyone seemed to hold his breath, as though afraid not to. The only moving things in the room were the Justice's eyes, which appeared to have gone dangerously out of control. Then, after a long moment, black robed shoulders were lifted to accommodate a tremendous sigh. The gavel darted into the air and came down against the stand with a blow that split it neatly in two.

"The case is dismissed!" the justice roared. "And this damned court is adjourned!" And hurling the gavel to the floor, he lifted his robes about his ample waist and stalked ceremoniously out of the room.

Through a stunned silence, Toffee

rushed gleefully to Marc and George. Reaching them, she stopped and gazed bewilderedly from one to the other, rather duplicating the performance of the remorseful waitress. Then she threw her arms around the one on the left.

"You can't fool me, Marc," she sighed happily.

Immediately, arms closed around Toffee's waist and drew her closer. She drew back.

"Let me go, George!" she cried. "You're taking advantage of my mistake."

George released her. "How did you know?" he asked disappointedly.

"Don't be silly," Toffee laughed. "If Marc ever showed that much cooperation, I'd drop dead . . . of sheer joy. I'd . . ."

"Holy smoke!" George broke in unexpectedly. He was looking fixedly at the clock on the opposite wall.

"What's wrong?" Marc asked.

"It's only five minutes to twelve," George replied uneasily. "My thirty-six hours are all but over. The High Council will be recalling me any minute now."

Meanwhile, the spectators had joined together in a general exodus. With a definite feeling of having been cheated, they were moving toward the doorway in a sullen, grumbling tangle. Some, however, were struggling toward Marc and his companions. These were reporters.

"Oh, Judas!" Marc cried. "If you fade out right here, where they can see you, we're cooked. Let's make a run for it!"

**T**OGETHER, the threesome made for the only available avenue of escape . . . the door to the Justice's chambers. Reaching it, they slammed it after them and turned the lock. A

second later the reporters also reached it and began to pound against it. The fugitives turned to inspect their surroundings. Apparently, the Justice had already gone in search of greener, more soothing pastures, for the walnut-paneled room was deserted. They exchanged congratulatory glances and joined together in a sigh of relief.

Toffee turned to the throbbing door. "Go way!" she yelled. "We're closed for alterations!"

George's eyes, though, were on the desk clock. Now, it was only three minutes to twelve. "Tell me," the spirit said hopefully, turning to Marc, "did I really help you out there in the courtroom?"

"You were sensational, old man," Marc said, feeling a sudden warmth for the ghost. "Couldn't possibly have seen it through without you."

"You aren't just saying that to be nice, are you? The Council will have ways of knowing your true feelings."

"I wouldn't lie to you, George."

George extended his hand, and grinned as Marc accepted it. "It's been fine knowing you," he said. Then he turned away. "You know," he continued foolishly, "I feel real sentimental."

Toffee crossed to the ghost and silently took his head in her hands. "This time it's no mistake, George," she said softly. And pulling his face level with her own, she kissed him well and soundly, full on the mouth.

"What a time to be leaving," George said regretfully when it was over.

And even as he said it, he began to fade.

"Goodbye, George, old boy," Marc said. "We won't soon forget you."

"No," Toffee seconded. "Not in a million years."

George was grinning as his face dissolved into thin air. The word "good-

bye" whispered through the room, and for a moment seemed to coil warmly around Marc and Toffee, engulfing them in a tide of friendliness. Then it was gone.

"You know," Toffee said thoughtfully, "he really wasn't such a bad sort. I hope he makes out well with that High Council of his. They sounded awfully heavyhanded."

"If my feelings in the matter count for anything," Marc said, "he's a cinch."

During this tender passage the drumming had continued, unnoticed, on the door. But now that George had been seen off in proper style, the insistent reporters resumed their former place of pressing immediacy on the agenda.

"We've got to get out of here before they break that door in," Marc said.

"There's a side door," Toffee observed. "The Justice must have gone out that way."

"Good night!" Marc cried. "And the darned thing has been unlocked all this time. The reporters might have walked in on us at any minute. Well, let's get out before they do."

He walked to the door and reached for the knob, but he never quite completed the motion. Suddenly, the door burst open in his face, and its edge caught him squarely between the eyes. For a moment he rocked crazily back and forth, then he closed his eyes and crumpled to the floor.

The young reporter bounded into the room and stopped short. He could have sworn he'd seen the redhead when he'd first thrown the door open, but now she didn't seem to be there at all. He searched the room systematically and finally decided the girl had only been a trick of the imagination. Settling for second best, he turned his attention to Marc.

He looked at the unconscious man

and frowned. There was something odd in the way the fellow's lips kept moving. Also, something odd in his expression. He seemed to be holding a whispered conversation with someone. The reporter dropped to his knees and lowered his ear to Marc's murmuring lips.

"No, no," Marc was saying. "No, Toffee! Stop wrapping your arms around my neck like that. What are you trying to do, throttle me? Can't we say goodbye without all that?" Then he made a strange whooshing noise as though a fist had been jabbed into the pit of his stomach. For a moment his expression was angered, then it slowly relaxed. "Goodbye," he whispered. "Goodbye."

THE reporter sat up, deeply perplexed. If he had been expecting to overhear an inadvertent confession, he was sadly mistaken. He wasn't quite sure just what he had heard. It didn't seem to make sense.

It might have made a great deal of sense, however, if the reporter had only known of the valley of Marc's mind and the blue mists from which Toffee had come, and to which she was returning. If the young man had only known of these things, he might easily have written the most startling story of the year. As it was, though, he only shook his head, got to his feet, and went in search of water with which to revive Marc.

\* \* \*

It was an apprehensive Marc that left the elevator and made his way slowly toward apartment 17-B. Since the sudden departures of George and Toffee a sobering reaction had set in and certain salient facts, relative to his financial and domestic status, had made themselves hatefully apparent. That George had managed to guide the courtroom fiasco to a satisfactory conclu-

sion hadn't really resolved any problems other than those that he, George, had created himself. Otherwise, everything was just as unsettled as before. Probably more, by now. Marc sighed heavily and proceeded to the apartment door, where his ring was quickly answered by the diminutive maid, Marie.

Marie's distress was ill concealed. "Madam is most wretched," she said. "She awakened only a bit ago, and the papers seem to have upset her terribly. I took some breakfast to her, but. . . Perhaps if you went to her now. . ."

Marc left Marie wringing her hands in the hallway. He knocked lightly on Julie's door and when he received no answer, went on in.

Julie, looking very small and miserable against a cloud of pillows, was lavishly salting a plate of scrambled eggs with a flood of tears. She was so absorbed in this undertaking that she didn't notice Marc until he sat down beside her on the edge of the bed. Immediately, she threw her arms around his neck, buried her face against his lapel and proceeded to soak it through.

"Oh, Marc!" she sobbed. "I feel like such a horrible mess. I could die! I didn't know until I read the papers. Why didn't you tell me? I thought we were rich!"

With his free hand, Marc reached out and plucked the paper from between the pillows. The article was easy to find since it was still damp around the edges. It was the review of "Love's Gone Winged."

"Marc Pillsworth," it said, "the big advertising man from whom the Broadway wiseacres were unanimously predicting a swift and unconditional trip into the unholy state of bankruptcy, last night proved himself to be the same shrewd businessman who raised the Pillsworth Advertising Agency from a

pup several years ago. With last night's opening of "Love's Gone Winging," a musical, starring none other than Mrs. Pillsworth, herself, our hero has turned out to be the sole owner of the season's most lush theatrical gold mine. He laughs best, it appears, who has the inside info on Julie Pillsworth's extraordinary talents.

"Mrs. Pillsworth, appearing courageously under her own name, has proved herself a musical comedienne of no mean standing. It is true, of course, that during her first scene she appeared nervous and restrained, but that can be attributed to first night jitters, an occupational malady that is easily forgivable on the occasion of an opening night. The real story, however, was told after the first scene. Mrs. Pillsworth, having apparently found her footing with the audience, hit the footlights with a surging vengeance that reacted on the paying customers like an electric shock. After that, she carried the show, almost single-handed, to a raging finish that had the boys and girls out front cheering the house down.

"A new dancer, a redhead unfortunately not listed on the program, appeared briefly to set the stage afire with a routine that did not dwell on inhibitions. The young lady's unusual exit was an effect that. . ."

The paper fell from Marc's hand and sprawled out on the floor. He could hardly believe his eyes. He gently lifted Julie's face away from his sodden lapel.

"But that's wonderful!" he said excitedly. "You were a sensation!"

"I know," Julie said dejectedly, blinking back the tears. "That's just the trouble."

"What!"

Julie nodded. "The only reason I was any good, though, was just because I was so mad I didn't know what I was

doing. I haven't an ounce of talent, really. I couldn't possibly give another performance like that, even if I had to."

"Oh," Marc murmured unhappily. "Then we're washed up after all."

"Oh, no!" Julie cried. "Linda Godfrey came backstage after the show and I talked her into taking over. She knows the songs already and she's stepping into my place tonight. The show will run forever with her in it."

Wonderful relief surged through Marc. "Then why all the weeping?"

THE tears welled in Julie's eyes again. "I nearly ruined you. I badgered you into it, and you let me do it, you dope. I feel awful. I feel like a fraud, too. I'm not a star. I'm just an ex-chorus girl with delusions of grandeur."

"Nonsense," Marc said. "You *are* a star. The paper says so. It's nothing to cry over, darling. Retiring like this, after a one night triumph, you'll be a Broadway legend. And on top of all that, you've steered me into one of the best investments I've ever made."

Julie blinked. Apparently she hadn't thought of it quite that way. A thoughtful smile played over her lips. "It does kind of add up that way, doesn't it?" she murmured. "Everything did turn out pretty well, didn't it?"

"Sure it did. So let's have no more of this crying. Why don't you put on your best clothes and go out and bask in your own glory, just for the thrill?"

Julie gazed up at him, and there were stars in her eyes. "You're so wonderful," she sighed. "You make everything seem so right. I wish I'd wakened you when I came in last night so we could have talked it over then. It would have saved me so much misery. But it was so late, and I felt so awful, I just didn't have the courage."

"Oh, that's all right," Marc said

quickly. "Probably it was all for the . . ."

Suddenly he stiffened.

His gaze had wandered absently to the outspread newspaper on the floor, and a caption was shrieking up at him; "Marc Pillsworth and Unidentified Woman Jailed on Suspicion of Robbery!"

Marc's hand reached down and caught the paper in a strangle hold. Obviously, Julie hadn't bothered to look any further than the theatrical section, so, for the time being, he was still safe. He stuffed the paper under his coat and turned back to her. His throat was dry.

"Maybe you hadn't better go out after all," he said in a rush. "Maybe you'd better just stay right here, where you are. Don't get out of bed."

"What?"

"I was . . . was thinking," Marc gasped. "You . . . you must be awfully worn out after all those rehearsals and last night's per . . . and everything. Maybe you should just stay here and rest for a few days. You know, complete rest . . . no telephone calls and . . . uh . . . newspapers. Nothing to upset you."

Julie gazed at him questioningly for a moment, then she smiled. "Maybe you're right, dear," she said. "I do feel pretty tired at that." She reached out and patted his hand fondly. "You're so thoughtful. You do worry about me, don't you?"

Marc nodded uneasily, and gazed quickly out the window. He was feeling a little guilty.

But not very.

THE END

# REVERSE ANALOGY



By FRANCES YERXA



IT IS the habit (as anyone who has studied electricity knows) for books about electricity, to explain their subject in terms of familiar things like water flowing, water pressure and so on. This is a good practice and it helps anyone who is not familiar with the subject, to understand it in terms of more concrete thoughts than electrons and other abstruse entities. When the books compare voltage with water pressure, we feel that we understand what voltage really means.

This practice of describing and comparing abstruse thought with concrete material things is known as analogy and it has helped scientific thinking a lot. But now the shoe is on the other foot. Ever since Steinmetz and his associates worked out the simple logical theory of alternating current, the progress of the theory and the industry has been enormous, until now, there is very little electrical theory that can't be thoroughly and soundly treated mathematically.

The same is not true of certain phases of mechanics, notably those phases that have to do with vibrating bodies, with sound, with insulation, with springs and shock absorbers. When

objects of these types have been designed in the past in industrial plants, nine times out of ten, the designing is governed and assisted by no scientific rules. It is a matter of trial and error. Suppose for example, that a factory which manufactures a refrigerator wants to eliminate some objectionable vibration that it engenders. Ordinarily, the engineers will play around with the machine, putting springs here, pieces of rubber there, shock absorbers here—until they've eliminated the hum or vibration. It disappears but they don't know exactly why.

But that is being rapidly changed. It has been known of course for a long time, that certain physical quantities can be compared with electrical quantities: for example, resistance is like friction, voltage is like force, inductance is like mass, etc. down the line. Well, technicians know in lavish detail how to handle the electrical factors from a mathematical standpoint. In fact, any electrical device is completely designed on paper and its actions are known from a theoretical standpoint.

Why not apply this electrical knowledge to mechanical problems, substituting electrical

quantities where necessary? The rest is a matter of calculating what the results are, reconvertng to mechanical quantities again—and presto!—you have your machine with the bugs eliminated.

This has been done and is being done. The results are astounding. What used to be a matter of tedious trial-and-error, is now merely a question of rapid and accurate calculation.

The theoretical man no longer thinks in terms of stiffness, friction, force, etc. His mind works with electrical quantities, and he's able to grind out the correct answers with hardly any trouble, whereas previously it was impossible to predict how a machine would behave, especially with regard to its vibratory properties.

Oftentimes, when examining a machine, the pads and supports for its insulation seem extremely trivial and simple. They look almost as if they'd been placed there at random. That isn't the case however. That machine has been carefully analyzed mathematically and each in its place for a definite reason. It's not there

by chance.

The whole subject of "dynamical analogies" as it's called by the scientists, is extraordinarily important today with high-speed machines being built all the time. Gas turbines, aircraft, electric generators, microphones and a thousand and one other things call for this sort of analysis. Consider an airplane driven by a jet engine; if vibration is allowed to creep into the high speed turbine wheel, that wheel almost immediately tears itself to pieces, squirting loosened blades from the sides of a plane like a garden hose squirting water. Suitable design can prevent this. That is why so much stress is being laid upon the subject.

The amusing thing about the whole matter is of course, the reversion of analogy. One minute we're explaining electricity and its behavior in terms of flowing water and crude mechanical analogies—the next, we're doing exactly the opposite just as if we knew what electricity is all about—and we don't!

## MAGNETISM IN THE

★ HOME ★

By JON BARRY

**K**NOWLEDGE of giants of steel and iron with electromagnets weighing hundreds of pounds and capable of lifting many times their weight is common conversation. However, recent inventions have led those in the field to look to such places as the kitchen for further applications of the power of magnetism. One such invention, by an enterprising husband, has started the race. The brainchild, as always, is the application of the simple principle of the electromagnet. Disgruntled with the possibility of repairing the electric food mixer this gent devised the electromagnetic mixer. It consists, essentially, of two parts, the electrical apparatus, housed in a cylinder and a little bar magnet. The simplicity of the invention can be seen from its operation. For example, should the housewife desire to whip up a cake it is done very easily by placing the metal mixing bowl on the apparatus cylinder and the bar magnet is dropped into the ingredients. The current is then applied and the work is just about done, for a look at the bowl will show the bar magnet whirling around in the batter at amazing speed doing the work of the beater. This is not the only application of the new mixer. Further improvement by the inventor disclosed that beside doing the ordinary work of beating and as a julcer, it has a varied scope of use, even as far as doing the scouring of pots by the use of a metal pad attached to the bar magnet.

\* \* \*

## GALVANIA AND THE

★ FROG ★

By JUNE LURIE

**W**ITH the renewal of scientific investigation in the eighteenth century, new studies were made in the ever baffling field of electricity. Numerous demonstrations took place to show the effects of the shock realized from the Leyden Jar. About that time the electric eel was brought to Europe for study. It was found that it discharged a like shock similar to the Leyden Jar. Here, it was thought, was the answer they sought. Animal electricity, as an extensive field of study, overshadowed all others. A great exponent of this phenomena was Galvania, an Italian physicist. The story goes that he observed the reaction in muscular movement of a frog's leg when one of the nerves was touched by a metal which was exposed to the charge of static. In his further work, he discovered that a like effect would occur without the electric discharges when two unlike metals were joined and their free ends connected to the animal tissues. With the absence of the electrical discharge Galvani then concluded that "animal electricity" was discharged through the wire from the tissues. With this he was thoroughly convinced and wrongly published his conclusions in 1791. Although he was proven wrong he provided the impetus for further study in the field which culminated with the work of Volta. He showed that the effect Galvani observed was really independent of the animal tissue and was due to the metals alone.

# ***The Happy Death of***

***by Gerald Vance***

**Algernon Applenod was sure of only one thing — he would rather be dead than live with his wife — a wish that was suddenly granted him**





# Algernon Applenod

WHEN Algernon Applenod entered the dining room for breakfast he glanced apprehensively at his wife. She was reading the morning paper and from her expression he realized that things were going to be more than usually unpleasant.

"Good morning, dear," he said, sitting down and pouring himself a cup of coffee.

"Good morning?" Bertha Applenod said with heavy sarcasm. Her tone implied that anyone who regarded this weather as pleasant should be placed in an asylum under heavy guard.

Algernon, a small, neat man in gray clothes and a gray mustache, winced

imperceptibly. He knew his original diagnosis had been correct. This was going to be bad.

He drank his coffee in silence and glanced at his watch. There was time for another cup but under the circumstances he felt it would be wiser to get out quickly. "Have to be running along," he said. Getting to his feet he started for the door but his wife cleared her throat meaningly and he stopped in his tracks. He turned and she was looking at him over the edge of the paper. There was something in her spare angularity, in the tightness of her lips, in her thick, steel-gray hair that had always terrified

Just as the door opened, Algernon was caught in the girl's embrace. He became rigid with fright as he realized his wife was in the room



him; he wondered irrelevantly how he had ever developed the courage to ask her to be his wife. Possibly it hadn't been courage, just stupidity.

"Was there something you wanted?" he said.

"There's a sale on fur coats at Neary's," she said.

"Oh," he said. He felt trapped.

"What is that supposed to mean?"

"Nothing, my dear. Just plain oh."

She folded the paper and put it neatly beside her plate. "Every woman at the club has a new fur coat this year. *Their* husbands seem to find this post-war period profitable. They don't come around with excuses about shortages and high costs."

"If you could wait just—"

"Wait! How long do you expect me to go along looking like this?"

Algernon felt like pointing out that she had looked the same for some twenty years; and that no conceivable change in clothes could possibly make any difference. He felt like saying that, but it wasn't a very strong feeling.

"Things aren't so good right at the minute. But if you want the coat I think it will be all right. Was there anything else?"

"Yes, you enjoy watching me beg for things, don't you? Now that you've graciously consented to my buying a coat which I should have had years ago, you want me to come crawling for something else, don't you?"

"That's not what I meant."

"Don't tell me. I've got ears, haven't I?"

This was a question that didn't call for an answer so Algernon remained unhappily silent.

"If my dear George were alive I wouldn't be in such a miserable state. There was a man, let me tell you, Algernon Applenod. He adored me, absolutely adored me!" She sniffed slightly.

"If he had been spared things would have been different, I can tell you."

Algernon agreed with this completely. Things would have been different had his wife's first husband, George, lived. Had George, of whom Algernon had heard a steady flow of praise for the past ten years, curbed the drinking which had resulted in his untimely death, everything would have been changed. *He*, for one thing, would undoubtedly be a happy bachelor at the moment.

George had fallen into the river one afternoon after putting away twenty-two bottles of beer at a local picnic. Prior to this he had attempted to lead the minister's wife into a near-by field for purposes which Algernon had always felt were slightly less than moral.

"I'm sure dear George is happy now," Algernon said, trying to strike a safe note.

"Happy? Knowing the way I'm being treated do you think he can be happy?"

Algernon glanced furtively at his watch. "I must be running along now," he said. He hurried out the front door and behind him he could hear Bertha's shrill voice raised in new complaints and imprecations.

**W**ALKING toward his bus stop he was too disgusted to notice the clear weather, the bright sunny sky. His thoughts were turning inward gloomily; what sort of life was this he was leading? Married to a grim, untouchable shrew, who seemed to spend all her time figuring out ways and means to make him miserable and uncomfortable. Was that the best the world had to offer? Was that all he could expect?

There had been a time when his hopes were higher, his chances brighter. Many years ago he had loved a young

girl named Billie Smith. She had been a chorus girl, working near his college town. Billie had been blonde, luscious, brainless; a giggling, good-natured creature without worries or inhibitions. In short, everything Algernon was not. His background had been straight-laced, conventional, and it had taken him some time to get used to Billie. Then, when he was prepared to marry her and ignore the consequences she had fallen from the runway one night and fractured her lovely neck. Algernon had never gotten over this; he had married Bertha and settled down to make a living, but always Billie had remained in a special niche of his memory.

Algernon was so absorbed with these reflections that he stepped off the curb against a red light.

Later the truck driver told police there just wasn't time to do anything. He had been coming along at forty miles an hour and this little guy had stepped squarely in his path. He had slammed on the brakes, but it was too late . . .

The bellhop took the grip from Algernon's hand.

"Just come with me, sir." He was a tall, smiling youngster with handsome good-natured features.

Algernon let him have the grip and stared about with eyes that were widening incredulously. He was standing in a vast, gorgeously decorated chamber that seemed to be the lobby of a hotel. Smartly dressed men and women were walking about, smiling cheerfully; music, gay and bright, drifted in from somewhere and about everything was the aura of lushness and pleasure.

The bellhop said, "Right this way, sir."

Algernon stood stock-still, rooted to the floor, while his eyes moved about

to take in the beauty of the room and his mouth dropped open foolishly.

"I—I," he said, but he couldn't get any more words out.

Then a thought struck him like a thunderbolt. He had stepped into the path of a truck; there had been a scream, the protesting shriek of brakes and then . . . His thoughts stopped right there. *What then?*

He looked helplessly at the bell hop.

"Who are you? I mean where am I? What sort of place . . . what's happened to me?" The questions popped out of his mouth in such a rush that the words blurred together.

The bellhop chuckled. "Don't worry, that will all be explained to you. Just come with me to the desk and we'll get you fixed up with a room. I expect you could use a little rest and maybe a good stiff shot, eh?"

"No, I don't think so," Algernon said weakly. "You see my wife doesn't approve of drinking. Says it makes a beast of a man. I never quite understood what she meant, but—"

He broke off in confusion. Why was he babbling on like this? Why did he feel so light-headed, so foolish?

THE bellhop put a hand on his arm and steered him across the lobby to a wide, curving desk on which there was a register and an ostrich quill pen. Putting the grip down the bellhop smiled reassuringly at him and went away.

There was an elderly man seated behind the desk and when he raised his eyes and saw Algernon he smiled broadly.

"Well, how are you, Mr. Applenod? Been expecting you."

He put out a large soft hand which Algernon shook weakly.

"Now, let's see," the man went on. He glanced down at the registry book

and frowned slightly. "First thing we've got to get you a room." He stared at the book and began humming under his breath.

Algernon watched him with something like terror. The man was big and fat but he seemed capable and sure of himself. His eyes were deep blue and he was almost bald except for a fringe of white hair about the side of his skull. It looked just like a halo.

"By the way, just call me Gabby," he said. "If you want anything, give me a ring. I'm generally here."

He thumbed through the registry book and finally let out a pleased grunt. "Well, here we are. Three-ten is vacant. Fine room, too. First class view. You're a lucky man, Mr. Applenod."

"Am I?" Algernon considered Gabby's comment dubiously. "Can't you tell me what's happened to me. Where I am, and all that?"

Gabby laughed cheerfully. "Why, sure. I've had your file out just a while back when I learned you were on your way. You're an accident case, right?"

"I don't seem to remember very well. I—I guess I stepped in front of a truck."

Gabby beamed. "That's what I mean." He chuckled then as if the thought of someone stepping in front of a truck was highly humorous. "You not only stepped in front of a truck but you got yourself knocked for a row of ashcans."

He smiled with such relish at this that Algernon felt it only sporting to grin weakly. "I guess it is rather funny. But I'd like to know where I am."

"Coming to that, son. You got hit by this truck and then Replacement took over your case. Course they got it all balled up as usual, sent us a lot of wrong information, but it's all right

now." Gabby glanced at a folder beside his elbow and nodded. "Yep, it's all set now. That truck driver's in for a little surprise." He began to chuckle again. "He's going off a bridge before the month is out and is *he* going to get wet." Leaning back in his chair, Gabby laughed until all three of his stomachs shook sympathetically. "Yes, sir, he's going to take that turn just like always, wide open doing about fifty. And right in the middle of the bridge there's going to be a big cow standing there, blinking at the headlights. He's going to swerve to miss the cow and ram smack through the guard rail."

"Gracious!" Algernon exclaimed.

"Ain't he going to be surprised?" Gabby chuckled and pushed the folder aside. "Now about you, Mr. Applenod. Might as well tell you the facts. No use beating around the bush. You're at a way station right now. You didn't quite make the grade for the real good place." He looked darkly at Algernon. "Some things in your report concerning a girl named Billie Smith don't read so good."

"Billie Smith!" Algernon cried. "I—I did nothing with her that wasn't completely circumspect."

"Don't go for big words myself," Gabby said. "Recollect one night in the rear of a car when you was parked with Billie Smith on Horse Neck Row?"

Algernon swallowed suddenly. Memories flooded him, causing him to blush painfully. *That* had seemed so long ago, but Gabby's stern gaze brought it back as if it had all happened yesterday.

GABBY'S grim frown relaxed. "See?

You was wearing one of them fancy raccoon coats and had a bottle of cheap gin with you. Billie was wearing . . ." He coughed and looked down at the registry book. "No need

to go into what *she* was wearing. Wouldn't take me long, though, to name each item. About one second, I guess."

"What's going to happen to me now?" Algernon said miserably.

"Nothing too bad, son. First of all you'll go up to your room, I suppose, and have a bite of food. Just call room service for what you want. After that you can do about as you please. There's a few regulations here but not enough to bother you. Now just make up your mind right off to the fact that you're dead and it will all seem easier. Don't be mourning for your wife and friends. Won't help none."

"I don't—I mean, I didn't—have any friends," Algernon said, feeling inadequate.

"Well, don't be worrying about your wife, then."

"I—I won't," Algernon felt his first reassuring moment. Remembering Bertha and her violent tantrums made him feel slightly better. "There—there isn't any way she could get up here, is there?" he asked Gabby.

Gabby shook his head despairingly. "You're going to be like all the rest, I can tell. Worrying about how to get your wife up here with you. Well, that's out! She's down where she belongs and there's nothing you can do to get her here with you."

Algernon let out a long relieved sigh. "Well, if that's the way it is, I'll just have to do without her," he said. He began to grin. Gabby looked at him a moment and winked solemnly.

They both began laughing then and Gabby said, "I expect you'll have a pretty good time of it, Applenod. Kind of guess you deserve it, too."

The bellhop returned then and picked up his grip. "All set?" he asked Gabby.

"Yep. Take him away. Good luck, Applenod."

The bellhop took Algernon to a suite on the third floor overlooking a lagoon that nestled in a quiet grove of trees. He put the grip down beside a wide bed which was covered with a silk spread on which a design of intertwined roses and violets had been sewn. The rest of the room was done in delicate pastel shades and seemed to Algernon to be suitable for the bridal suite of the Waldorf.

"It's kind of fancy," the bellhop grinned. "We had a young couple in here last year and this is what they liked. If you don't get used to it call Gabby and he'll have it changed."

Algernon looked furtively at the wide bed with the rose coverlet.

"A young couple, you say? Do they allow such goings on here?"

"Goings on? I don't understand what you mean."

Algernon blushed scarlet. "I just thought . . . I meant . . . it seems kind of out of place."

The bellhop threw his head back and laughed "Boy, it's easy to tell you just got here. No, sir, such goings on aren't out of place. In fact they're pretty common, as you'll find out."

"Oh, gracious!"

"You'll have fun finding out, too," the bellhop said. He grinned, waved cheerfully and went out the door.

Algernon sat down on the bed and cleared his throat nervously. He was unsure of what he should do, of what was expected of him. But it seemed pretty definite that the life he had lived with Bertha was over and done with. Now that he had a new start he didn't know what to do with it.

Finally out of curiosity he opened the grip the bellhop had left by the bed. In it were fresh linen, brocaded silk pajamas and a red silk dressing gown with a wide belt and sharply pointed lapels. Looking around Algernon saw an open door through which he could

see a bathroom done in gleaming black marble.

Since there seemed nothing better to do he took off his clothes and got into the long sunken bath tub. When he turned on the water taps a flow of scented water came out. For an hour he luxuriated in the tub, then got out and dried himself. He put on the silk pajamas and red dressing gown and stretched out full length on the bed. From the open windows flower-laden air came into the room, soft and strangely exciting. He lay there for a while thinking of nothing in particular. His thoughts wandered and finally he fell asleep.

He was awakened by something touching his lips. His eyes flew open and for a moment he was rigid with panic. Long blonde hair was in his face and laughing lips were above his, open to display twin rows of gleaming white teeth.

"Surprise!" a cheery voice giggled.

"Hey!" Algernon cried.

"What kind of a welcome is that?"

"Hey!" Algernon said again, this time in real alarm. This grinning girl was lying beside him, raised on one elbow and her body was disturbingly close to him.

"Algernon," she said, with a giggle. "Don't you remember me?"

Algernon looked at her and said, "Oh, my God," in a bleak-strained voice.

MEMORIES were returning of a night spent in the back of a car with nothing to warm the two people there but a raccoon coat and a bottle of cheap gin; and a few natural developments.

"Billie!" he gasped. "What are you doing here?"

She sat up cross-legged on the bed, grinning at him. "That's a fine question. I've been here all along. But

what are *you* doing here? Did that raccoon coat keep you from making the grade?"

"I don't know, Billie. I guess so."

He became suddenly embarrassingly conscious that she was wearing nothing but an abbreviated bra and a pair of yellow silk shorts. She was barefooted and her long slim legs were tanned to the color of smooth honey. Her long blonde hair hung down to her bare shoulders, framing pert, saucy features, clear, friendly blue eyes and a mouth that was the color of crushed cherries.

"Billie, you've got to get out of here," he said, in alarm. "Someone might come in."

"Why should anyone come in?"

"Well, they just might." Algernon remembered a hundred movies he had seen during the summer months when Bertha visited her family in Maine. Every time a practically undressed girl came into a hotel room, she was inevitably followed by the house detective and members of the vice squad. Algernon did not know why this was so; but it always happened that way.

He pulled the lapels of his dressing gown tightly together. "You've got to go, Billie. I'm terribly glad to see you, of course, but you can't stay here like that."

"Like what?" Billie demanded.

Algernon looked at her smooth bare legs and then glanced quickly away as his face became hot. "Like that," he said. "You're almost undressed."

"I generally don't bother with all these clothes," Billie said casually, "but it was cool today. Algernon, you don't act a bit happy to see me. Won't you give me a little kiss?"

"Please!" Algernon gasped.

Billie giggled and then leaned over and kissed him soundly on the mouth.

"Stop it."

"Oh, don't be such a prude."

"Billie . . ."

"I forgot you were ticklish, Algy."

"Let me alone."

She unfastened the top button of his pajama coat, ran her fingers over his ribs. "You're cute, Algy." She giggled and kissed him again. "You weren't so backward that night when we ran out of gas on the Horse Neck road."

"That was different." He tried to squirm away from her but it simply wasn't possible.

"Why don't you give up?" Billie giggled. "It doesn't make any difference."

"No?"

"No!"

"Billie, stop that."

"Give up?"

Algernon Applenod, with practically no thoughts of his straight-laced background, of his conventional upbringing, of his erstwhile shrewish wife, Bertha, did the only sensible thing he could at the moment. He gave up.

". . . I THINK I'll have my things moved in here."

"You can't do that," Algernon said. "It—it wouldn't look right."

"Algy, the people here have a different attitude about some things. You'll have to get used to it."

Algernon thought that over for a moment and then sighed philosophically. "I'll just have to make the best of it then."

Billie giggled. "You're starting all right."

Two weeks went by quickly and Algernon began to notice a change in his manner. There was a sparkle in his eye and a new thrust to his jaw. He had even started singing in the shower, a practice which Bertha had discouraged. He couldn't figure it out but he supposed it had something to do with diet or climate.

When he told Billie about the way he felt she laughed and nudged him in the ribs. Sometimes he just didn't understand her at all.

It didn't bother him very much. He was enjoying himself as never before in his drab, miserable life. He had discovered the fun to be had with liquor, and on some days he had as many as three drinks.

Then one morning his dream was shattered. He was stretched comfortably on his bed watching Billie do her daily calisthenics. This was a very pleasant occupation. Billie wore white elastic shorts and a bra which equalled approximately the area of a postage stamp. And as she twisted and bent, the play of light muscles under her silken skin was highly instructive to watch. Algernon, as a result of his attention, felt qualified to teach an advanced course in applied biology.

Now she was lying on her back inhaling and exhaling deeply and rhythmically.

"You should try this, Algy," she said, between breaths. "Might stir you up a little bit."

Algernon smiled like a true man of the world. "You stir me quite enough, Billie."

"You cute thing," she giggled. "Come here and feel how my chest goes up and down."

"That's the best offer I've had all day," Algernon said, with his new flair for the light retort.

Sitting on the floor beside her he put a hand experimentally on her chest. She continued to breathe. Algernon nodded judiciously. "Very interesting," he said, thinking of something far removed from personal hygiene and deep breathing exercises.

It was at that moment his dream world was shattered.

There was a loud, angry knock on

the door; then a voice—a horrible, familiar voice—suddenly began shouting:

"Worm! Scum! Ingrate! Let me in, you miserable little whelp!"

Before Algernon had time to comply with this request the door flew open and Bertha charged into the room, followed by Gabby, who was looking flushed and harried.

Bertha stopped in the middle of the room and glared down at Algernon and Billie, her eyes narrowing with bitter anger.

"So!" she shouted in a voice one notch below the volume of a college yell. "This is the way you're carrying on!"

SHE looked more hideously formidable than ever, Algernon thought quakingly. She was wearing a black dress and black stockings, with her steel-gray hair pinned in a tight knot at the back of her neck. Her gray skin was paler than ever and her deep, frightening eyes were gleaming with triumph and anger.

"What are you doing with that hussy?" she shouted.

"Exercising," Algernon bleated hysterically.

"Ha!"

"Her chest goes up and down when she breathes. Very curious, my dear. I was just—"

"I can see what you're doing. Take your hand off that naked Jezebel, Algernon Applenod."

Algernon jerked his hand away from Billie's chest as if she had suddenly been transformed into a hot griddle.

"Yes, my dear."

Billie sat up and looked at Gabby in bewilderment. "What's the idea?" she demanded.

"What God hath put together and all the rest of it." Gabby mopped his perspiring brow and glanced furtively at Bertha. "This here is his wife. She just got here a few minutes ago. She got bit by a dog. The dog died, too."

"And I'll take that little worm of mine out of your clutches, you shameless harridan." She sniffed and drew herself up a full inch. "I would rather be dead than expose myself in such a wanton fashion."

Billie made a vulgar noise with her lips. "No one would look at you anyway, so I don't see anything to get excited about."

Bertha ignored this and turned to Gabby. "Do I have rights, or don't I?"

"Expect you have." He turned heavily to Algernon. "This here's your lawful wife and you'll be expected to live with her while you're here. That's the law."

"Get to your feet!" Bertha said ominously.

Algernon stood up unsteadily and Bertha took a firm grip on his left ear. "I'll fix you when I get you alone," she muttered.

"Can't you do anything?" Algernon yelled to Gabby. "She'll kill me."

"Can't do nothin'," Gabby said. "She's got the law with her."

Bertha tightened her grip on Algernon's ear. "Hear that, you worm!"

The door suddenly opened again and a large, red-haired man came unsteadily into the room. He was huge, with heavy, hairy hands and from the aroma that surrounded him it was apparent that he was deeply drunk. Grinning slyly he glanced about the room, his little eyes lighting with wicked humor.

"Sure and it's quite a crowd ye've got here." He belched and weaved unsteadily. "But there's just one of yez that I'm after."

Algernon realized that the grip on his ear had been released. Bertha's hand had fallen to her side and she retreated



a step, her face whitening. There was an expression about her features he had never seen before; it was fear and terror. She wet her lips and whispered hoarsely:

"George!"

"Sure and it's meself," he answered, grinning.

ALGERNON'S eyes widened. So this was George, Bertha's first husband. The paragon of masculinity, the good provider, the tender lover. He looked like a big ugly bum to Algernon, but he reflected piously that appearances might be deceiving.

Bertha put one trembling hand to her throat. "I'm surprised," she said, and her voice was a shaky whisper.

"I'll bet," he said grimly. "Tell me are you glad to see the old man?"

"Yes, George," Bertha said meekly.

Gabby looked from George to Bertha. "You two was married, eh?"

"Sure we was," George said. He looked at Algernon and laughed rudely. "I'll bet this little shrimp is her second husband. Sure, and I'll bet Bertha loved a little mouse like that to play with. She never had much stomach for a real man."

Gabby pulled at his ear. He shot a quick glance at Algernon and winked. "There's the law to think about now. You two—George and Bertha—being married first are supposed to be together here. So that's the way it'll be."

"Fine!" George grinned. "I've kind of missed the old bag of bones."

Bertha looked about entreatingly and then began to whimper.

"Stop that foul noise!" George bellowed. "Silence is what I like from a woman. Have you forgotten?"

He stepped to her side and whacked her heftily on the hip. "No tantrums, love, or I'll have to use the back of me hand on you."

"Yes, George," Bertha whimpered.

"Fine. Now we'll be getting to our quarters. I've some sewing I want ye to get done and then ye can go down and get me a big pail of beer. After that, well." He grinned lewdly and nudged her in the ribs. "We might find a bit of the old love left, eh?"

Bertha swallowed audibly. "Yes, George."

George put an arm about her thin waist and hauled her to the door. "Bye, folks," he boomed. "Be seeing you."

He went out, slamming the door.

Gabby scratched his head and winked at Billie. "Quite a man, eh?"

"You're quite a guy yourself," Billie grinned.

Gabby smiled complacently and went out the door.

Billie stretched out on the floor again and began breathing deeply. Algernon looked at her for a long, thoughtful moment and then he began to smile.

"I never thought Heaven was going to be like this," he said.

Billie sat up straight. "Algernon Appleden! Where in hell do you think you are?"

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## TRACING OCEAN CURRENTS



By SANDY MILLER



THE United States Department of Commerce Bureau of Fisheries can discover the course of ocean currents by dropping bottles in the water. The bottles have information sealed in them that tells where and when they were dropped. When the bottles are washed

ashore in some distant land, the finder reports to the government agency. In this way, the Bureau of Fisheries is able to learn more about the travels of schools of fish. It takes a bottle 515 days to float from New England to Ireland, and 562 days to travel to Scotland.



The bartender listened intently as Jim Ward spoke to an apparently empty bar stool . . .



# The RING of FAITH

by  
**William P. McGivern**

**Jim Ward needed one thing for  
success — someone with confidence  
in him — so he bought the ring . . .**

**J**IM WARD walked down Michigan Boulevard on a cheerfully sunny winter morning, but the bracing weather failed to put life in his stride or a sparkle in his eye. He walked like a man starting the Last Mile.

There were reasons for his gloom. Under his arm was an advertising presentation over which he had labored for two weeks; ahead of him was an interview with J. Darrel Fallonsby, president of Magic-Moment perfumes, a domineering, hysterically unreasonable

character who reputedly existed on a diet of carrots and raw advertising men.

Jim Ward's job was to convince J. Darrel that his program would cause women to buy Magic-Moment perfumes by the hogshead and to use it instead of bath water. This was not an original idea with him; other account executives had tried it before and their bones were now bleaching under therapeutic lamps in mental sanitariums throughout the country.

There were other considerations. His

own boss, David Dewitt David, expected him to return with J. Darrel's signature and an initial billing of several million a year for the agency. Also, David Dewitt David's daughter Davina, had hinted that her interest in Jim might be quickened if he closed the deal.

All of this was bad, but it wasn't the worst.

The worst angle to the deal was that the copy and art work under his arm was hopelessly lousy. It wouldn't sell perfume to a stockyard worker at a dime a gallon. It just didn't have it.

He had written the copy himself, selected the art work personally, but it added up to nothing. Now he was walking into the lion's den with his job and romantic expectations hanging in the balance and instead of a ripe red steak he had nothing but a stale hamburger to toss the growling animal.

He wondered vaguely how his life had gotten so involved. When he came out of the army he had one thing in mind; to use advertising honestly and truthfully to raise the standards of the people, emotionally, culturally and spiritually. He intended to fight ignorance and prejudice with advertising. Instead he was using what little skill he had to cater to the sensual appetites of pampered women.

The thing started when he went to work with David Dewitt David. There was no room for truth and honesty there, he discovered in a hurry. Then came Davina, a slim, exciting girl with a face like an angel and tastes that could hardly be catered to on a copy writer's salary. So he worked harder, forgot about his idealistic plans, and in a year's time he was on the agency's planning staff, with a salary that could keep Davina in the diamond clips and terrapin she loved with every fibre of her simple soul.

Once you started, he learned, you had to keep going. Now he was at the logic brink; J. Darrel Fallonsby ahead of him, David Dewitt David at his rear. That left no place for Davina, he decided rather gloomily, unless she stood on his shoulders.

When he stopped at a red light his eye was caught by an interesting display of jewelry in a novelty shop at the corner. Since he was not anxious to hurry he stepped over and looked in the window. There were zircons, trick bracelets made of chain and jade, and a large tray of rings.

The rings interested him for some reason. They were obviously cheap, with imitation stones and crude settings. But they caught his eye.

After a moment or so he realized that his attention had been caught by one particular ring. It was made of heavy brass and there was a figure of a girl carved on its surface. He stared at it for several minutes, curious as to why it caught his eye. There was nothing distinctive about it, but he didn't seem to look at any of the other rings.

HE GLANCED at his watch and realized reluctantly that he'd have to be getting on. Turning he started away, but he felt a curious tugging at his sleeve.

He stopped abruptly. Looking around he saw no one, but his eyes were again caught by the ring.

"This is foolishness," he said, half aloud.

He stood indecisively for an instant, then walked into the shop. He felt like a complete fool.

A smiling young clerk came up to him and said, "Can I help you?"

"Well, I just thought I'd look around."

"Perhaps you'd like to see a ring?"

Jim stared at him. "What gave you that idea? I'm certainly not interested in rings."

"We have some very nice ones," the clerk said. "Sure you won't have a look?"

Jim felt caught in the grip of destiny. It bothered him. He couldn't breathe so well.

"All right," he said, feeling strangely helpless.

As he half feared and half hoped, the clerk went to the window and returned with the tray of rings. "This just came in," he said. "A gypsy who is going out of business delivered them yesterday."

Jim wondered vaguely how a gypsy went about going out of business, but he said nothing. He looked at the rings carefully. He reached for an imitation ruby, but a curious thing happened. Something deflected his hand and his fingers picked up the heavy brass ring with the figure of the girl on its surface.

"Now, that's a beauty," the clerk said, smiling.

Jim studied it thoughtfully. The figure of the girl was perhaps a half inch high. She was slim, exquisitely formed and attired in nothing but a primitive G string. Her eyes were closed and her face looked calm and composed. He slipped the ring on his finger and it fitted perfectly.

"How much?" he asked quietly. He knew when he was beaten. But he didn't know how.

Twenty minutes later he stepped into J. Darrel Fallonsby's conference room. The sight of J. Darrel, himself, surrounded by his various satellites, minions and apple polishers, did nothing to improve the condition of his ulcers. J. Darrel was not an impressive figure of a man. But he had impressive figures in banks and deposit vaults where it

meant more. His stomach protruded, his eyes looked like nervous oysters and his complexion was a nice tint of purple, the result of high blood pressure irritated by chronic bad temper.

There were no pleasantries, no greetings. J. Darrel said, "Let me have the presentation, Ward."

"Yes, sir," Jim said. He took his work from the manilla folder, passed it to J. Darrel. "If I may say so, sir, it's quite an unusual idea."

"Hrrmph," J. Darrel said.

He settled back in his chair, put pince-nez glasses on his crimson button of a nose and peered balefully at the copy.

"Naturally," Jim said, "this is a rough draft, sort of talking things over on paper."

"I see what it is," J. Darrel said, enigmatically.

Jim waited tensely. Across from him J. Darrel's brother-in-law, a mouse-like little man watched J. Darrel carefully for sign of a reaction. J. Darrel's brother-in-law had sold vacuum cleaners without particular success until his sister's fortunate marriage had relieved him of the necessity of making a living.

THE other men at the table were there for the sole purpose of inflating J. Darrel's already dangerously enlarged ego. They would not squeak until he gave them a cue.

"Hmmmmmm," J. Darrel said.

His brother-in-law looked doubtful. The proper reaction to a "Hmmmmmm!" was something he hadn't learned.

J. Darrell cleared his throat and put the copy and art work on the table.

"This stinks," he said, gently.

There was a very definite flood of relief on the faces of his minions. They had the compass reading now; they knew the direction. They all stared at Jim haughtily, coldly.

"Sir, don't you think—"

"I *do* think," J. Darrel said. "Are you implying I don't?"

"Nothing of the sort, sir, only—"

"Let me finish, please. This copy is quite bad. I know of no way to tell you precisely how bad it is without wasting two or three hours of my time. However—"

He went on about the copy, until Jim thought there was nothing left to criticize but the paper it had been typed on; then he began on the art work.

Jim listened for a while, helplessly. Then he focused his eyes on the ceiling and tried to forget the rasping, insulting voice that was tripping him up one side and down the other.

Everything had gone smash. David Dewitt David was going to be unhappy, Davina, his black haired daughter, was going to be unhappy. Jim knew that he, himself, was going to be the most unhappy of all.

Suddenly he became aware of a prickling sensation on his left middle finger. He glanced down and noticed the ring he had bought on the way to the conference. He removed it and rubbed his finger; then he looked at the ring.

J. Darrel's voice droned on.

Jim looked at the tiny figure of the girl on the ring and he felt a sudden resentment. She looked calm and poised, her patience molded forever in unchanging brass. She was lucky! She could afford to look smug, not to care.

"Indifferent little witch," he murmured to himself. "Watching men make fools of themselves and not caring. Relaxed, composed, forever quiet; what do you care of the problems of flesh and blood, the anguish of human beings? You have quiet and peace for all time. Lucky little brass witch."

"Mr. Ward, am I boring you?"

Jim's head snapped up. J. Darrel

was glaring at him.

"N—not at all, sir. I—I think that's a good point."

"Hmmm," J. Darrel said. He looked suspiciously at Jim for a moment, then went on with his diatribe.

Unconsciously, almost against his will, Jim looked down again at the ring. And got quite a start.

*The tiny brass figure had disappeared!*

He rubbed the smooth surface of the ring and then he rubbed his forehead. Was he going nuts? One minute the figurine had been in place. Now it was gone!

"I'm right over here," a light voice said. "Please don't be startled."

Jim's stomach turned a queasy somersault.

He raised his eyes in the direction of the voice. Unbelievably it had come from J. Darrel's position at the head of the conference table.

THERE was a girl sitting on the arm of his chair smiling impishly at him; a slender, red haired girl with light blue eyes and fine creamy skin. She had a pert nose and a square stubborn little chin.

The image of the figure on his ring; only now her face was alight and the composed, relaxed expression was gone.

Jim felt his senses swimming. He knew he had gone suddenly, incredibly crazy, but he was still shocked. His tottering reason was not assisted by the clothes the girl was wearing, or rather the lack of them, for she was practically nude although she didn't seem to mind. There was a wisp of something about her waist, another wisp about her breasts and golden sandals on her slim bare feet. That was all. Not even a hat, he thought idiotically.

"What the hell's the idea?" he said.

J. Darrel's voice choked on a word. "Are you talking to *me*, young man?"

"Of course not," Jim said reasonably. "I'm talking to that girl sitting on the arm of your chair."

"Oh, I see," J. Darrel said. He picked up a piece of paper and said, "Well, to get on—" He stopped abruptly. "*What girl?*" he roared. "Have you gone mad?"

"They can't see me," the girl said, with a tiny grin. "You're the only one who can, which makes you pretty lucky."

J. Darrel was glaring at him, as were his satellites. The girl grinned sweetly. "They think you're slightly cracked," she said.

"I am not cracked," Jim said stiffly.

J. Darrell said, "I am relieved to hear it." He looked down at the paper again, then shot a suspicious look at Jim, as if expecting him to be cutting paper dolls. Reassured he went on talking.

The girl smiled and came over, sat down on the arm of his chair. "They can't see or hear me. Now listen to me; I don't know much about what's going on, but I'm pretty sharp. Why don't you sell him the idea of using an age-old mysterious formula for his perfume? Call it Forbidden, or something like that and give him a story that the ancients banned its use because it drove men and women crazy? Wouldn't that work?"

J. Darrel said, "Are you following me, Ward."

"No," Jim said to the girl.

J. Darrel's fist crashed onto the table. "Don't you find me clear?"

"But perfectly," Jim stammered. "You see I wasn't talking to you. I—I was talking to someone else."

"In that case," J. Darrel said gently, "I think we might as well terminate this discussion. If you have some astral

communicant who is more interesting than I, please don't let me interfere. Gentlemen, the meeting is over." He stood up decisively.

The girl shook Jim's shoulder. "You simpleton, what's wrong with my idea? Give it to him with both barrels and watch him bite."

Jim stood up, too, partly because J. Darrel had, partly because of the girl's shove. He knew something had to be done, and the girl's pitch was just crazy enough to work. She didn't exist, of course, he told himself hysterically, but what difference did that make? Maybe nobody existed. Maybe J. Darrel was just a toy balloon with a face painted on it. Philosophies had been built on screwier ideas.

"Now hold everything," he said. He raised his voice over the shuffling of feet and scraping of chairs. He knew advertising, he could sell. And the girl's suggestion had stirred him from his despair.

HE FIXED his eye on J. Darrel. "I brought you a presentation, Mr. Fallonsby that you think is putrid. Did it ever occur to you that I might also realize that it is worthless?"

There was a moment's silence in the room and then J. Darrel sat down slowly. Everyone immediately sat down also. "Just what do you mean?"

"Simply this; it is a bad idea. You know advertising, you know it's bad. I know it's bad. Now why do you suppose I brought it to you? Was I trying to fool you?" He made a slight gesture indicating the complete impossibility of *anyone's* fooling J. Darrel Fallonsby. "Maybe you think I was merely trying to insult you?" He raised an eyebrow. "No advantage in that, surely. No, Mr. Fallonsby, I brought you that copy just to show you the conventional, mediocre type of thing that is being done

these days. *That* is what you don't want. I'll tell you now what you *do* want."

The girl clapped her hands excitedly. "You're terrific!"

Jim went on. "You want a program that will move Magic-Moment perfumes off the counter so fast that your factories will be six months behind in their deliveries. Listen to me; the ancient rulers of Egypt once had a very grave problem. There had come into usage among the people an exquisite, maddening perfume, made from a formula that had come from Phoenician traders. Imagine if you can a scent as subtle as a breath of mimosa in a long closed room, as exhilarating as dawn over snow-capped mountains, and as promise-laden as the dark and murmuring Nile, itself. Imagine this scent which transformed the lowest maiden of Egypt into a glorious Aphrodite and drove the men into frenzies of ecstatic intoxication!

"Think of the perfume! So maddening, so glorious that it caused murder, intrigue and caused tremors that finally shook the throne of Egypt. Faithful wives turned harlot; the priests became libertines; fields were left idle, work stopped, while that great nation lost its soul to the promise of beauty and enchantment that was carried in the slightest whiff of this perfume."

Jim paused, then: "Finally, steps were taken. Steps were taken," he repeated solemnly, "to outlaw the use of this scent. The rulers of Egypt knew their nation was doomed unless it was suppressed. Fines were imposed for anyone using it; smugglers lost their lives; dealers were imprisoned. And finally their campaign of extermination, which the officials and police of the nation conducted, began to have results. The stocks of this perfume were destroyed, the formula was burned in the

public mosque at Cairo. And slowly, gradually, the people regained their sanity."

Jim paused and looked about the table. Five pairs of wide eyes returned his gaze; five mouths were hanging open foolishly. They were hooked.

"That is what I have brought to Magic-Moment. The formula of this ancient Egyptian perfume, which was known in history as *Forbidden!* Are you interested?"

J. Darrel said after a long silence. "You have this formula?"

The girl said, "He's nibbling."

Jim settled back in his chair and grinned. "Of course not. I have just told you a pretty story. But," his fist crashed suddenly on the table, "it's a story that will move Magic-Moment into every home in the country!"

"That's a mistake," the girl said anxiously, "You should have told him you had a formula."

J. Darrel's brother-in-law said, "It sounds fishy to me. I think—"

"Oh, shut up," Jim said to the girl. "I know what I'm doing."

J. Darrel's brother-in-law flushed. "What do you mean telling me to shut up?"

J. Darrel chuckled. "He means for you to shut up, Abner. Isn't that clear?"

J. Darrel's brother-in-law smiled weakly. "Of course. Ha, ha. Perfectly."

"Get to work on it," J. Darrel said. "It's terrific. Make it big, Ward. Spread it all over the country. Everything is in your hands. My lawyers will send the contracts over tomorrow. Gentlemen, the meeting is over."

**W**ALKING down Michigan Boulevard Jim felt like a man in a dream. Not the least of his dazed attitude was a result of the girl who





The ring shimmered, and the figurine on its surface seemed strangely alive . . .

walked at his side, half trotting to keep up with his long strides.

"Go away," he said, rather desperately. "I could stand pink elephants or green snakes. But you are too much."

"I won't go away," the girl said. "You brought me here, so it's up to you to at least be polite to me. I helped you out with that perfume idea, didn't I?"

"You have been most kind," Jim

said with a kind of glassy-eyed horror. "Now goodbye."

He walked firmly into a bar and ordered a double shot of rye. The bartender looked at him dubiously. "Been on a big one?"

"Why don't you leave me alone?" Jim snapped to the girl who had followed him inside and seated herself on a stool beside him.

"Well, all right," the bartender said

moodily. "I was just being sociable."

"I wasn't talking to you," Jim said irritably.

The bartender looked up and down the long room. "I see," he said gently. "You was talking to that girl sitting beside you?"

"Can you see her?" Jim demanded eagerly.

"Sure," the bartender nodded, as he poured the drink. "She's about nine feet tall and has snakes growing out of her head."

"I like his nerve," the girl snapped.

Jim put his face in his hands. "What did I do to deserve this?"

The bartender shrugged and walked away.

The girl pulled a hand from his face. "Now you listen to me," she said. "I got in trouble a long time ago with a mugg named Yogar. He was a wheel in Calcutta a few centuries back. One night he invited me up to his room. I knew the pitch but I thought I could take care of myself. That shows how smart I was."

Jim turned slightly to look at her, reminding himself firmly that she didn't exist; that he was crazy. She was sitting sideways on the stool, the heels of her sandals hooked over the top brace of the stool, her chin supported on her two fists. She looked very glum.

"Well, what happened?" he asked.

"Oh, the usual thing. I'm just telling you this so you'll understand about me. He had the candles down low, there was a cozy fire in the grate and a swell dinner fixed for us on the patio. After dinner and a few drinks he wants me to go into the bedroom to look at his collection of knives."

"We use etchings," Jim said.

"You're all alike," she went on moodily. "Anyway I said thanks but no thanks. I told him I liked the dinner and was grateful for the drinks but

that I was going home. He got very mad. He was quite an operator. Knew all about magic and things like that. He did something to me that transformed me into a tiny bronze figure. Then he had me fitted to his ring. He wore it all his life. After he died the ring I was on got passed all over the world. The guys who have had me on the hook!" She shook her head half-humorously. "Anyway part of Yogar's deal was that if anyone ever believed in me I could get off the ring and finish out my life. You kind of believed in me and I've made the first step. Now if you keep on believing in me I'll be all right. Maybe then other people can see and hear me, too." She caught his hand anxiously. "You believe in me, don't you?"

JIM had another double rye. "No," he said firmly, after he finished the drink. "I believe I am nuts. Go away. Come back as a pink elephant or a green snake and I'll throw a bromo-seltzer at you."

He put some money out on the bar and walked out. Keeping his eyes straight he walked to the curb and hailed a cab. When he got in and closed the door he was alone. He glanced cautiously at the street and saw no sign of the red-haired apparition. He felt his heart slowing down to normal. He gave the driver an address, settled back and closed his eyes.

When he walked into the lobby of the Palmer House ten minutes later Davina jumped up from a chair and hurried to meet him.

"You're late, dear," she said, smiling.

"Oh, yes," he said vaguely. He glanced about the busy lobby with the uncomfortable feeling the red haired girl might be somewhere around.

"Are you looking for someone?"

Jim sighed and looked down at

Davina. "No, I had a crick in my neck," he said. "Shall we have some breakfast?"

"Yes, then I want to know everything that happened."

Jim knew he couldn't tell her of the red haired figment of his imagination whom he had left, half-clad in a Michigan Avenue bar. Davina was not the type who would understand.

When they had ordered breakfast she leaned forward and said, "Just one word, Jim. Did you get it?"

"In a word, yes."

She relaxed against the satin chair back and smiled slowly. "Now isn't that sweet," she said softly.

"Practically delicious," he muttered.

She looked beautiful, he thought, with her black hair brushed down to her shoulders, gleaming red lips and round eyes; but he was annoyed. He was getting back to normal again and his conscience was bothering him about the preposterous campaign he had sold J. Darrel Fallonsby. What an end to use advertising for! The whole deal was an insult to the intelligence of the people who would read it, to the helpless people who have it blasted into their ears on the radio. Where, he wondered dismally, was his once noble idea of selling tolerance and wisdom to the people, instead of stupidity and soap?

He glanced up and suddenly his heart almost stopped beating.

"Oh, my God," he said in a low voice.

"What is it?" Davina asked.

COMING forward with a smile was the red haired girl. She was still wearing the wispy loin cloth, the wispy bra and her bare shoulders and bare legs gleamed whitely from the overhead light. She walked through the crowd of people, through waiters and tables with the ease of a ray of sunshine. And she sat down beside Davina with a

cheerful grin on her face.

"Didn't expect to get rid of me so easily, did you?"

"Go away," Jim said in a hollow voice.

"Jim!" Davina gasped.

He felt tired of explaining that he was talking to an apparition.

"Forget it," he said. "I'm upset today."

"But you closed the deal with Fallonsby, didn't you? I should think that would make you pretty happy."

"Oh, sure," Jim said. "I sold a stupid man a bill of goods so he can go on selling it to people still more stupid"

"You aren't feeling noble again, are you?" Davina said with a little smile.

"You mean my big idea about educating the people, about tolerance, honesty, intelligence and all that sort of thing? Maybe I am."

"That's just sophomoric."

The red hair girl looked at Davina with distaste. "This, I suppose, is your big romance," she said to Jim. "What a prize package. Naturally she wouldn't go for ideals. Not enough money in them. She's like a big warm contented cat. Look at her fingernails. Just like claws. And how about that little pink tongue she shoots out to lick at creamed chicken?"

"Jim," Davina said, "is something wrong?"

"What do you mean?"

"I don't know. But you're watching my hands and you're watching me eat in a very peculiar way."

Jim choked. "Sorry, if I stared," he said. "I—I was thinking of something else."

"You should think of something else," the red haired girl said. "Something that's got a heart and soul instead of red ink in her veins."

"What do you know about her heart and soul," he snapped.

Davina put her napkin down warningly. "You've been drinking, Jim! I smelled it on your breath when I met you. Maybe you'd better go home and sober up."

Jim looked helplessly at the red haired girl and shuddered. "I think I will," he said.

He got up from the table and hurried to the street. He grabbed the first cab and went to his apartment. Inside he locked the door and poured himself another drink. The last in the bottle, he noticed gloomily.

**H**E SAT down and closed his eyes.

Why was he so upset? Because he was going crazy? Or because he knew Davina and he would never get along? Or because he felt like a louse about his work?

What difference did it make?

"This is about my last chance," a voice said.

He opened his eyes, saw the red haired girl sitting on the edge of his bed.

"You," he said wearily.

"Yes, it's me." She sounded sad. "This is about my last chance to make you believe in me. Why can't you Jim? You see me, touch me, hear me?"

"Hallucination," he said briefly.

"You did what I told you to and it worked," she said, defensively.

"Neurotic reflex," he said.

"You believe in lots of things less real than me," she went on. "How about your ideas about tolerance and honesty and educating the people. Did you ever see tolerance or wisdom? Did you ever see the people, for that matter?"

Jim thought about it for a while.

"But nobody else sees you, nobody else hears you," he said. "It's just my imagination."

"If you believed in me others might," she said. "If no one believed in toler-

ance it wouldn't exist either. But if one person believes in it then it comes alive."

Jim finished his drink, looked at the empty bottle. He picked up the phone and asked room service to send him a double rye. Then he looked at the girl. She seemed to be crying.

"Now stop that right away," he said sternly. "I won't stand for that. You've got no right crying."

"I don't want to leave," she said, still crying.

He gave her a handkerchief. "Women who cry shouldn't exist anyway," he told her, with what he realized was impressively bad logic. He looked down at her and realized for the first time that, apparition or not, she was awfully cute. If this was a product of his imagination, then he had one hell of an imagination.

Her skin was creamy white, the texture of fine satin. Her hair and eyes and figure had been put together by a first class imagination. She was a lovely figment.

There was a knock at the door. He opened it, took the tray of drinks from the waiter and brought it to the table beside the bed. He sat down and handed her a drink.

"But stop crying, for heaven's sake," he ordered.

**S**HE blew her nose and stopped sniffing. "You're starting to believe in me, aren't you?"

"Yes, but I'm crazy," he said cheerfully. "So it won't do you any good."

She began to cry again.

The phone rang. It was the desk clerk.

"Mr. Ward," the desk clerk said in very severe tones, "I must ask you to get rid of that young lady in your room."

Jim grinned into the mouthpiece.

"That's no lady, that's a figment."

"The waiter saw her. She must leave immediately."

Jim stared at the phone in awe. "The waiter saw her? Is he a trustworthy man? Does he drink, or have hallucinations?"

"Certainly not. He's completely reliable."

"Wonderful," Jim shouted, and slammed the receiver down.

He looked at the red haired girl thoughtfully. Then he put his arm carefully about her shoulders. They

were slim and smooth and warm.

"You hear that?"

"Yes," she sniffed happily. "He saw me. I'm real. You must have believed in me, Jim."

"Funny, but I don't believe in Davina anymore, or David Dewitt David, or J. Darrel Fallonsby. What do you suppose is happening to me?"

"I wouldn't know," she said shyly.

"Let me see if I can make it clearer," he said.

He did.

THE END

## TELEVISION KEY

★ By A. MORRIS ★

EARLY experimental work in the field of television was conducted in 1925 and successful transmission of images was accomplished by the Bell laboratories in 1927. This first experiment, successful beyond expectation, was carried on between New York and Washington, a distance of 230 miles. For a long time the development of television was hampered by the lack of what was considered a suitable link between the light and electric current much as the microphone was in radio. Unknown, and by accident, the finding of this link came about by accident.

One day in Valentia, a terminal of the Atlantic cable, a young operator noticed that the needle of his indicator acted strangely for no known reason. Upon checking his apparatus he found that the electrical resistances were affected. Unaware of the discovery, he continued to watch the resistances for several days. Pausing to consider what might have been the cause, he learned that these instruments, constructed of selenium, were affected when the sunlight fell on them. Normally, selenium, compatible with sulphur, offers great resistance to electric current. However, when light was applied to it, it readily became a conductor.

As a result of this chance discovery, Selenium was tried as the necessary link needed for television. It proved satisfactory and soon Selenium cells were manufactured in quantity for further television study. Revised from its early design the Selenium cell was the essential force in bringing television to its present stage of development.

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## DRINKING HISTORY

★ By L. A. BURT ★

THE population of the earth and progress of civilization can be traced simultaneously with the development of the drinking customs of the nations. Most of the drinking customs of today have their beginning many centuries ago.

Bible scripture gives us the story of the offering which Jacob made by pouring drink on the pillar of stone to commemorate his communion with God. This custom thrived throughout the Greek and Roman days. On any occasion of solemn prayer or festivity a little wine was poured on the spot as a means of consecrating the ground and insure success of the venture.

Greek history often mentions the *symposia* or drinking parties which took place during the time of Plato and Xenophon. This is believed to be the origin of the present day saloon, for during the height of the Roman Empire the *symposia* was legally established as a place of business.

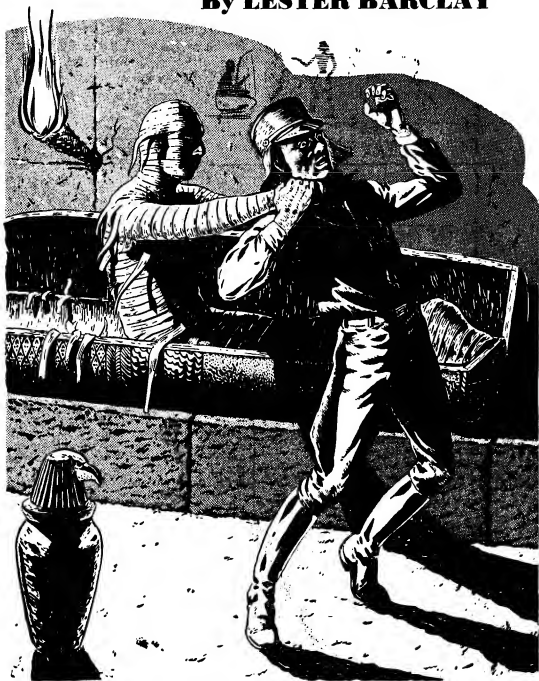
The toast before drinking was prevalent during the early German culture when a common bowl was passed among the guests. Each guest, upon drawing from the bowl turned to salute his companion. The toast of today is believed to be a carry over of this tradition.

Many of the old customs of the nations exist today. In Scotland and Ireland the gloomy festivity of drinking at the wake of a deceased friend is still practiced. Apprentices, upon entering a new profession, were obliged to donate a certain amount of money to cover the drinking expenses for the older members of the shop. Then it was called paying your footing.

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# The Charming Mr. Grant

By **LESTER BARCLAY**



A scream rose to Delia's lips as the terrible thing rose slowly in

## The Tomb of the Caliph had been opened, and Gordon Grant knew that his quest was ended—he had found his home

MRS. WILLOUGHBY was all aflutter . . .  
" . . . James," she cooed in delight, "we *simply* must be the first to have that perfectly *charming* Gordon Grant to our place . . . I know Delia will be *perfectly* delighted . . ."

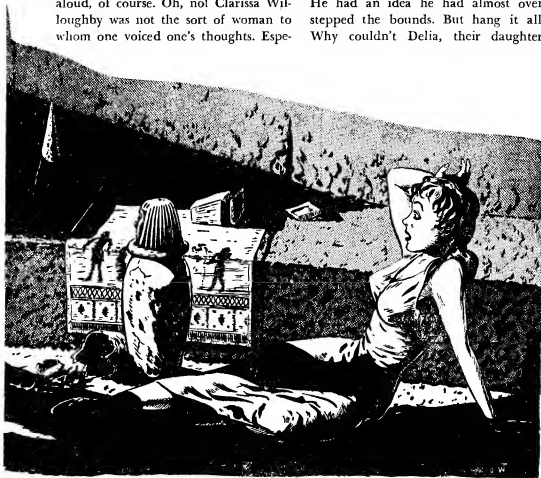
And I'll be *perfectly* bored, James Willoughby thought. Blast this idiot wife! was his second thought. Neither aloud, of course. Oh, no! Clarissa Willoughby was not the sort of woman to whom one voiced one's thoughts. Espe-

cially when they ran in that vein.

"Delia would be delighted," her husband said, "if Grant were a carbuncle with a pimple for a nose. And you know it, my dear!"

"*Must* you be so vulgar?" his wife asked. There was vinegar in her voice.

Her husband threw her a sidelong glance. There were very definite limits to what he could say and get away with. He had an idea he had almost overstepped the bounds. But hang it all! Why couldn't Delia, their daughter,



the coffin and fastened its fingers around Gordon Grant's throat . . .

have taken after his side of the family. The unvoiced center of the controversy entered the room at that precise instant.

Kipling must have had her in mind when he voiced his famous phrase, "a rag, a bone, and a hank of hair," because she had little else to recommend her. One of those things was her voice. It was low, a bit hoarse, but with an odd vibrancy which made listeners strain a little, as though they wanted to catch the tiniest inflection for fear they might miss something.

"Dad playing the fool again, mother?"

"Yes, darling," her mother replied. "He seems to play it so well . . ."

"Perhaps because you throw him so many cues," the girl said without a change of expression in either voice or look. She turned her rather odd-looking eyes toward her father, reclining in the pillow-back lounge chair set close to the fireplace. Her eyes were remarkable for their *lack* of depth and concentration. They were an amber-brown and were marble-round below straight brows of mouse-colored hair. The blank stare of her eyes confounded and made uncomfortable the most placid of people. Her father was neither placid or comfortable under their glance.

". . . Poor bedevilled father," she said suddenly. "She does lead you a dog's life. Remind me to get a license for you next time I'm downtown . . ."

For the instant of her understanding words, her father loved her. But as she continued, he threw her a glance of positive hatred. She intercepted the look but her face and eyes showed not the slightest change of expression. She turned to her mother again and said:

"Now what's this all about. . . ?"

"Gordon Grant, the traveler and lecturer," Mrs. Willoughby said. "Hattie Smith is giving a tea in his honor and I promised to come and bring you."

**D**ELIA WILLOUGHBY was tall, ungainly, thin-featured with high cheek bones too bare of flesh; her body was graceless, almost not womanly and her hands and legs were so heavy and thick they seemed not even related to the rest of her. She walked toward the other chair across from her father and so clumsily did she move it, seemed a miracle she reached it without knocking the coffee table over, or falling into the fireplace. She sprawled across one arm of the chair, her legs thrown over the other arm.

The girl looked into the dancing flames and spoke again:

"Such a Lordly lion and you're going to bring me, Plain Jane rabbit, to meet him . . . But why bother, mother? I'm sure Mr. Grant, the charming Mr. Grant, is interested only in how much money is involved. Since there won't be a cash transaction in having him over for dinner, he won't be interested I'm sure . . ."

Mrs. Willoughby's face flushed in a rush of blood which crimsoned her from forehead to throat. The implication in her daughter's words were quite plain. Further, what the girl had said was also true.

"And what makes you think Mr. Grant is a ready catch?" Mr. Willoughby asked.

It was a shrewd question, boring right down to the core of the whole position his wife was in.

"Why do you ask that? What makes you even presume to think the only reason I'm taking Delia along is for that purpose alone?" she demanded.

"Because mother," the girl answered for her father, "that has been the only reason I've been introduced to *any* male in the past four years."

"Well, this time you're both wrong!" her mother replied with some heat.



"I-I'm going and I want you to go because, because . . ."

Willoughby suddenly arose from his chair, a tall, stooped man with a lined face, whose deep intelligent eyes were somberly brooding. Through sheer mathematical genius he had risen high in the affairs of the banking world and was a millionaire many times over. His mind was razor-sharp in many ways, and of all the people with whom he'd come in contact only his daughter made him feel that his intelligence was of small moment. He had never backed away from a fight or a difficulty. Nor was he going to this time.

"I recall reading somewhere," Willoughby said, "and quite recently, that this *charming* Mr. Grant has stated publicly, he would do anything if he could find a backer for an expedition he planned. Further, when the interviewer asked him what, 'anything,' meant, he replied, 'Anything.' I know what's in your mind, Clarissa. And it might work. Only permit me to do the talking . . ."

For a long moment, across the sprawled shape of the girl, the man and woman looked into each other's eyes. And at last the woman shook her head in a signal of agreement.

**T**HERE was no doubt of it. Gordon Grant *was* charming. James Willoughby had to admit a liking for the man as he sat next to him at the small dinner they had given for the explorer and lecturer. And the liking stemmed not alone from Grant's manners, speech, and personality, but also from a something which could best be described as the *inner man*.

Grant lifted the slender bit of stemware on a level with his eyes, stared fixedly at the amber liquid the glass contained and said:

"The golden Tokay . . . An Emperor's

drink, a treasure, sir. A veritable treasure."

Willoughby's eyes lifted in startled acknowledgment of the compliment. There weren't many who knew the history of the wine he had served. The thirty bottles he had of the Tokay had cost him seven thousand dollars, truly a *golden wine*.

Grant touched his lips with the napkin and laid the cloth aside and turning to Delia, said:

"Your mother told me that the choice of the furnishings in the foyer was yours . . ."

The girl's expression didn't change at the rather unexpected sally into a conversational gambit.

" . . . May I ask where you acquired the chair?"

"Why do you ask?" she wanted to know.

"Well, for one thing, it *is* genuine. And for another it belonged to Harun al Rashid, the famed Caliph. It graced the loggia of his summer home in Rakka."

"Really, Mr. Grant?" Mrs. Willoughby broke in. "How interesting."

But Delia wanted to know more. For one thing, he had picked on the one thing in which she'd shown an interest at odds with her usual void insofar as the furnishings of the house went. For another, she *was* interested in how he knew that the chair was what it was. The dealer had asked for and got a fortune for it. He said it was the only one of its kind, the reason for that being that the chair was constructed of a wood which was singular for containing a certain resin having therapeutic values . . .

" . . . Yes. The Caliph suffered from an internal ailment which caused his ultimate death. His physicians recommended this chair be constructed because of the resin the wood contained."

"But how did you know it was *that* particular chair?" Delia asked.

"The mark of the Caliphate is inscribed in the wood where the right hand grips the arm," Grant replied.

Delia's round, black eyes travelled over the figure of the man opposite. He was wearing a blue-flannel suit, double-breasted, which fit him exceedingly well, yet which did not make him look like a tailor's dummy. Grant had good shoulders, a deep chest and from his stride, lean, muscled legs. His hands had strong characteristics. But it was his face and voice which really held one's attention. His face was lean, strong-boned, saturnine sometimes in its expression, with deep-set eyes of brown which could throw a piercing glance to startle. His voice was used not just for talk, but for all the delicacies of expression, for illustrating with sound the workings of his evidently more than excellent mind. No wonder, she thought, this man became a lecturer.

But Willoughby wasn't interested in how Harun al Rashid sat in his summer palace in Rakka. He liked things done in their proper time. And he believed this was the proper time for the completing of the deal he had in mind for Grant.

"If the ladies will excuse us . . . ?" he said, starting for the library.

They would and did.

A MOMENT'S questioning and Willoughby verified the report he had read. Yes, Grant had made the statement attributed to him.

"I have a proposition for you, Mr. Grant," Willoughby said. "Now, I suppose you have at least heard of me. I'm a very well-to-do man, the kind of man who has been picked many times to 'angel' something. I have always steered clear of such schemes. This time I'm prepared to go all the way. That is, if

you will accept the terms I have to offer . . ."

Grant's thick, straight brows drew together in a frown. But he said nothing and after a few seconds, Willoughby went on:

"I am quite prepared to spend a great deal of money in anything you may venture into . . ."

"A million dollars?" Grant asked quietly.

A full moment went by in which the two men simply stared into each other's eyes without saying a word. Then Delia's father let escape a small sigh and said:

"Yes!"

He said it sharply and without equivocation. But before Grant could say anything Willoughby went on:

"On one condition, sir. You marry my daughter. . . ."

It was obvious from the startled look in Grant's eyes he hadn't expected that.

"Marry-marry your daughter? I don't understand. Wait. Let me get this straight. If I marry your daughter you will finance me to the extent of a million dollars? Right?"

"Exactly!"

And Grant was as sharp and unequivocal as the other in his answer:

"Done! The day you deposit to my credit at a bank I designate, the sum of one million dollars, I will marry your daughter—"

It was done as callously as that, and without Grant seeing her again until the day Mr. and Mrs. Willoughby drove Grant and Delia to a justice of the peace in a town not too distant from the city they lived in. The only words Grant spoke were on the ride back to his hotel. He said to Delia:

"We're leaving for the East in three days. I will call for you. Be prepared..."

\* \* \*

THE desert sun was hot. Delia, in a flowing white dress of silk Shantung

looked out on a scene of utter desolation. But so much greater was the desolation within her heart, her mind simply refused to grasp what her eyes saw.

Events of the past three weeks had passed with too great a rapidity, with too much kaleidoscopic effect for her. Her marriage, the short and strange honeymoon, strange because she had never seen Grant from the instant it had begun, the trip overseas to the Syrian port at which they'd debarked at last, and after various conferences with oddly assorted peoples, all dark, squat and given to the use of perfumes and colognes, the sudden departure for the desert and this villa at which they were staying.

In all that time she and Grant had occupied separate rooms.

Conditions had altered from the moment they stepped within the somewhat pretentious villa which, she discovered later, Grant had purchased from a bankrupt Syrian. Conditions had altered but whether for better or worse she couldn't say. She saw more of her husband, yet so changed was he that there were times she did not recognize him. For one thing he had lost his charm. He had grown thinner, the brooding look in his eyes was now their only expression, his face had become gaunt, and about him was a positive air of suppressed excitement which seemed to be ever present, as if he were expecting momentary climaxes to the expeditions he made to some nearby ruins. These ruins were the sole reason for their staying at the villa.

They had not been there when she and Grant arrived at the villa. But the following day a host of laborers arrived from a nearby village and began the huge task of unearthing them. Grant spent all of his waking hours in the supervision of the unearthing and now and then some of the hours which are usually spent in sleep.

Delia heard a sound behind her and turned her head. It was Fatima, her personal maid, one of the corps of servants Grant had hired for their use. Fatima spoke in French, the tongue common to them for understanding:

"Madam. The desert sun is not good when it lies overhead. Even those who have lived their lives beneath it seek shelter then."

DELIA followed Fatima to the loggia which was in reality a covered patio, screened by giant date palms and a lattice-work ceiling. A fountain stood in the very center of the court and its water played in oddly tinkling accents. A small table had been set close to the fountain. A pot of the now-familiar thick Turkish-type coffee stood on the onyx tabletop, and beside it cream, sugar and a small bowl of sweetmeats. Fatima made ready the coffee for her mistress. But the placid, olive-complexioned face twitched in surprise when Delia suddenly said:

"Please sit down, Fatima . . ."

"But madam . . ." the woman began.

Delia brushed aside the unvoiced objections:

"I know. You're my servant. Let's forget that and be women together. I'd like to ask you things . . ."

The servant lifted the cup in both tiny, slender hands and peered through slanted sloe-eyes at the girl opposite and tried to read what went on behind those blank brown eyes of her mistress. She had found Delia a mystery from the very beginning, much different in every way from any of the Europeans or Americans she had met before.

"I'd like to know what's going on at the excavation. What are they searching for? Tell me, Fatima!"

For an instant the slanted eyes rounded in surprise. Then they veiled behind their long lashes. Yet Fatima knew she

shouldn't have been so startled by the questions. There was little that went on in this house she didn't know of. Fatima had grown very fond of this woman, the more she came in contact with her. Yet she couldn't find it easy to talk. For Fatima had heard many things which might not be pleasant for the other to hear, and perhaps frightening. But the blank eyes staring so steadfastly at her from across the oval table were implacable in their demand.

"Madam's husband . . . ?" Fatima began afresh.

"You know better than to ask that," the girl said. "My husband guards his thoughts as though they were jewels. That is why I ask these things of you. Go on!"

There was no denying those imperious tones.

"Very well, madam. Once, in the long-ago, there was a city at the site of where they dig. It is said there were many treasures buried in the ruins. Madam's husband seeks these treasures . . . ."

"My husband has no need of money," Delia said. "He seeks something else. He looks for it with feverish eyes and brain. I know it! I have seen it in his eyes, and I have felt it in his walk and talk and soul. What is it he expects to find there? They finished the final digging yesterday. He has been there, living in a tent, for the past two days. What is there in those tunnels he expects to find?"

"My brother," Fatima said, her eyes lowered in deliberate avoidance of the amber ones seeking hers, "is the head dragoman. He has told me many things.

"The spot on which the digging has been done is accursed. Oh, please, Madam Grant! Do not be angry with Fatima . . . ."

"I am not angry," Delia said. "Only curious and puzzled."

"....Yes! The villagers refused to work for my brother. He had to bring workers in from elsewhere. Then my brother had to bring armed guards in . . . ."

THIS was news to Delia. Though once she had tried to bring the subject of the ruins to her husband's attention, he had brushed it away with a now-familiar brusqueness. She had tried that only once.

"Guards?" Delia asked in bewilderment. "Why?"

"Three of the men who labored in the tunnels died...terribly and mysteriously," Fatima said. She looked up then and a sudden terror mirrored in her eyes. "From that time onward the others worked only under the urgings of the whip. I heard of others dying, but whether it is true or not I can't say. But each day the villagers gather in small groups and talk and each night there are campfires at which men come, all armed, and lately, strangers from the *deep sands* have come . . . ."

"*Deep sands?*" Delia was shocked out of her usual pose of indolence. "What are those?"

"From the heart of the desert where the hyena prowls and the lion is king. These men are savages. For years the French and our own government tried to subdue them. But always they escaped and always a compromise was reached. They are brutal, without mercy!" the words came in a steady hysterical flow from Fatima. Fright and fear of the great unknown had lent wing to her words.

"But why? But why?" the words were wrung from Delia.

"Because your husband has violated the sanctuary of the sacred spirits," Fatima said. "So it was told to me."

Delia digested the information the girl had given her, in a long spell of

silence. She broke it by ordering Fatima to her other duties. Delia continued to sit at the small table for several minutes after Fatima left. Suddenly her chin tilted upward and her eyes and lips set in determination. She had made up her mind to have it out with her husband.

\* \* \*

GORDON GRANT was not the same man whom first she met in that seemingly long-gone day at her mother's home. He had changed. And not alone in physical things. He stalked into their room, removed the sun helmet he wore and wiped the perspiration from his brow. Delia was seated at the dresser running a comb through her hair. She could see his reflection in the glass.

His breeches were stained and dirty, as was his shirt. His face bore a three-day growth of beard. His eyes looked sunken and the shadows of the sockets showed strong and black. Lines made vertical planes in his cheeks. Gordon Grant looked completely played out.

"A hard day, dear?" she asked without turning.

He grunted an unintelligible something.

"I'll tell cook to get something together," she said. "You must be hungry."

"Don't bother. I had some dates with Hassid at the diggings," Grant said.

"Dates! Of course . . . By the way, Gordon," she continued in the same conversational tone, "what do you plan to do about the villagers?"

Grant stiffened as if the words had struck him physically. She could almost read his thoughts. He took a couple of steps in her direction but stopped as she continued:

"There's going to be trouble, you know. Why haven't you told me?"

This time he didn't stop but stepped to her side. She turned to face him, her

head back and her eyes probing his. Suddenly, unexpectedly, his hands leaped forward and fastening their fingers into the soft flesh of her shoulders, he dragged her erect and close to him.

"Because it's none of your damned business! That's why!" he growled, his face thrust close to hers, his breath stale, and his spittle mixing with the words. "So keep that long nose of yours out of my affairs. Just sit here and act like a lady. That's all you have to do . . ."

"Gordon!" her voice rose slightly. "You're hurting me!"

At the words he released her. And as she took a backward step, he slapped her viciously, once and again, the last blow bringing a stream of blood from her nostrils.

Not a word, not a sound escaped her tightly drawn lips. Only her eyes spat their hatred at him.

"There'll be more and worse," he promised, "if you meddle. Remember that!"

"I won't meddle," she said in a low voice. She seemed unaware of the crimson flow from her nose. "I promise you . . ."

His lip and nostrils curled like an animal's as he gave her a last look of warning. Then he turned and stalked from the room.

For a long time Delia simply stood and stared at the blank face of her door. Then at last she turned and went back to the dressing table and sat facing the mirror. Yet she saw nothing, not even the blood. Her mind was blank, her senses in a turmoil, and her heart pounding with trip-hammer beat. The drip of the spattering drops brought her to her senses at last. She took some kleenex from one of the drawers and wiped the wood clean of the stains. And as she wiped, she whispered:

"Out damned spot!"

FATIMA and her mistress sat again at the same table in the patio. Delia was reading a magazine she had read months before. At least she seemed engrossed in it. The servant girl was knitting. It was early evening, the sun having just sunk below the horizon, though the late afternoon heat still lingered in the air.

"... Fatima ..." Delia said without lifting her eyes from the printed page.

"Yes, mistress?" the girl said.

"Tonight, when all is quiet, you and I are going down to the village. ..."

"Mistress! Mistress, no, no!" there was positive terror in the girl's voice.

"Yes, Fatima. You, I and your brother. There are some things I must do. Be ready at ten...and have Hassid with you!" It was an order from which there was no turning.

Nor did Fatima dare to refuse.

The hour had barely struck ten. Three shadows detached themselves from the shape of the long, low house, and scurried to the shelter of the stable. While two of the shadows waited, the third stepped into the cool darkness of the stable. When the third returned he was leading three horses with him.

"... Mistress?" Hassid said.

"Do not fear, Hassid," Delia said. "I left him asleep, in a drugged sleep. He will not know. Come. Let us be off. ..."

The hoofbeats of the horses were muffled instantly by the sand. With Hassid in the lead, the three fled in the night. And only the moon, huge and cold-looking, lent them comfort in their flight.

Fatima had given Delia all the information she wanted while they waited for Hassid. The chief's name was Ali b' Gomar, and he spoke French. The village was some ten miles from the villa and it would take the horse a good two hours in which to get there. True, Delia thought as they rode at a furious

gallop, it does not give me too much time, but if I can get what I want across to the chief, we can do it handily. If not we'll have to trust to luck. That Grant might vent his spleen upon her in terrible fashion, did not enter her head. Her hatred was enjoying a full play now....

"There...those lights! The village," Hassid said, pointing to a small cluster of pin-point lights in the near distance.

Delia spurred her horse alongside Hassid and said:

"You will take me directly to the chief. And leave me there ...."

"But Madam Grant ...."

"Do as I say," Delia said in a low not-to-be-disobeyed voice.

TIME meant nothing. Whether it took a half hour or twenty minutes for them to reach the village, Delia did not know. But suddenly there was a furious barking of dogs, a horrible odor, and the blurred shapes of burnoosed figures moving, shadows among deeper shadows. Hassid continued his wild gallop into the very heart of the village. A pack of dogs followed at a discreet distance, barking their hatred from the safety of the rear. The three pulled up before the most pretentious of the huts. Lights gleamed through the open windows. Ali b' Gomar was at home.

Suddenly lights flashed upon them, figures became alive, men with modern rifles pointing toward them, bearded savage men, many of them. The door of the chief's hut was thrown wide and a tall figure was outlined in the light.

"Do not harm them!" Ali b' Gomar called in a low husky voice.

Only Fatima and her brother understood the chief's words. They were spoken in the idiom of the region. Yet, somehow, Delia got their meaning also.

Brown muscular fingers held fast to the bridles of their mounts. Savage faces

looked their hatred up at them. And Delia called in a strong voice:

"I would have words with the chief of this village!"

The light from the hut and the torches which were suddenly lighted by several of the men, showed the tall, breeched and booted figure of the white woman to them. Silence followed her words, and all movement stilled as she leaped from the horse and strode through the lanes of burnoused figures which had formed as though in appointed guard. As she reached the doorway, Ali b' Gomar stepped aside and Delia stepped over the threshold. With a motion of his head the chief signalled for several of the men to follow him. The door closed on them and left behind a frightened brother and sister, waiting with tense and breathless hearts, the re-opening of that door of fate.

\* \* \*

"**T**HOU art the first white woman to grace these premises," Ali said in formal French.

It was not the French Delia knew nor could she answer him in like manner. She didn't try. She had come with a single purpose in mind. Formalities had no place in her plan. She came down to basics:

"My husband has disturbed the sanctity of your land," were her first words.

The Arabs looked from one to another at the words. Then, as one, they turned to their chief. Ali b' Gomar was tall, slender still in spite of his sixty years, lean with the leanness of well-knit muscles, used to hard work. His dark face frowned and his brows knit as his coal-black eyes probed deeply into the amber-brown ones of the woman. They shifted toward her right hand which had suddenly dipped toward her pocket. He watched it curiously as her hand appeared again. Within the wide, large

hand was a thick bundle of money, American money.

"A token of my esteem," she said as she thrust the roll of greenbacks toward him. "I am not paying for the lives that were lost. No money can ease that sorrow. This is for something else . . ."

She stopped at the look in the chief's eyes. She followed the line of his glance to her thumb. Ali's eyes were fastened to the birthmark just behind the joint upon it with a sort of hypnotic, and terribly frightened look. Ali's head jerked upward; he took several backward steps, and strange words, which though Delia could not understand, still implied a sense of fear to her, stumbled from the chief's lips.

A strange and terrifying thing took place on the instant. As one, the others prostrated themselves before Delia. Only Ali b' Gomar remained erect. He bowed deeply, made the sign of reverence of a true believer, and without lifting his eyes, said:

"Oh, mighty one! It has come to pass as was foretold . . . The days of the greatness are upon us again. For was it not said in writings of the old ones that there would come the daughter of a Barmecide to rule the land again . . ."

A low murmur of voices in a sing-song chant came from the prostrate ones at Ali's words.

" . . . Ay! By the sacred sign has she come. Command us, oh, greatness! Thy smallest desire is our instant command!"

The last was said in French. Delia was at a loss. She hadn't the faintest idea of what had happened. But she *knew* whatever it was, was favorable for her and to her interests. Instantly, she took command. In a few crisp sentences she told Ali precisely what she wanted.

\* \* \*

**D**ELIA was already at breakfast when her husband appeared. He

had taken a shave, but her eyes crinkled in surprise at the way he had shaved. There was a ring of beard all around the mouth, from a slender line of moustache to a full beard which fell just below the strong chin. Grant's eyes were dull, lack-lustre and he walked slowly and heavily. He fell into the chair across from her and after staring blankly at the cup of coffee, shook his head with a strong movement.

"AAH!" he grunted thickly. "I feel as though I'd been working like one of the fellaheen . . ." He shook his head once again and continued: "Uh, like to see the diggings . . .?"

She held firmly to the cup in her hand, then let it slowly descend to the saucer. For the first time her eyes were no longer blank. They burned with a lambent flame as she said:

"Darling! How nice. But of course. Give me ten minutes to change . . ."

A peculiar smile twisted the man's mouth as his wife passed behind his chair. It was not a pretty smile, nor did it hold much of humor. There was something devilish in it . . .

Of course he couldn't see her face. He would have found it strange indeed to see the same look on it as his bore. . .

Hassid preceded them. Delia and Grant cantered along side by side. For the first time since she had first seen him, a semblance of the charm which had made him famous and which had so much to do with their marriage, manifested itself.

"MY LIFELONG ambition is now complete," he spoke with elation in his voice. "At long last. My dear, you just can't realize what this means to me. The final ground was broken yesterday and the door to the tomb was laid bare . . ."

"Tomb?" she said. "I didn't know you had been looking for a tomb.

Whose?"

"The famous Caliph, Harun al, Raschid. Yes. He lies buried beneath the ground in a huge vault constructed by ten thousand slaves. And with him is his seal. Look!"

He thrust his left hand toward her. There, upon his thumb, just above the joint of it was what at first appeared to be a birthmark, but on second look was an odd sort of insignia. Her eyes went wide as she recalled where she'd seen it last. Upon the arm of that chair she'd gotten from the antique dealer. The one in the foyer of her home. . .

"Yes!" his voice suddenly lifted trumpet-like. "I said I would return! The infidel will know the terror of my might. The strangers who have taken over my birthright will know the feel of my vengeance. And no more will the Bar-mecides connive for my downfall. I will be the avenging sword of Allah. And the hosts will again ride at my side . . ."

HE stopped quite suddenly in the midst of his tirade and looked at her with the most peculiar look of triumph and continued:

"Ay! And you will be at my side. For did not your father help me in my moment of need? You made this possible. My greatness will also be yours."

There was nothing she could say, she realized. Gordon Grant was quite mad!

She was stunned with the first sight of the ruins. She hadn't imagined how much work had been done. There were pillars, broken, yet showing lines of beauty, rearing emptily toward the burnished sky. There were great lines of concrete which might have once been palace walls. But dominating the whole scene was an immense excavation leading straight downward.



The three dismounted and after they had tethered their horses, Grant said:

"Hassid. Wait here. I will escort my wife to the chamber. Just make sure we are not disturbed. . . . By the way. Where are the guards?"

Hassid's head bent low and he spoke with his eyes lowered:

"They refused to come to work to-day . . ."

"Just as well," Grant replied. "We have no need of them anymore. Well, come along, dear. . . ."

He took a flashlight from one of the saddle bags and started down a series of steps cut into the earth. Delia followed. She counted two hundred and twenty steps before they came to a halt at a level spot. But their halt was only temporary. Gasoline-soaked faggots had been thrust into the wall at this level. Grant lit two of them. Then Delia saw by their light that here the tunnel took a turning. And now they travelled on a straight line. As they progressed Grant lit more of the torches. A tremendous amount of work had been done. The way led straight ahead for a full three hundred yards before it ended abruptly at a door set flush with the earthen wall. Grant stood by its side and said:

"The sacred resting place. Here lies the earthly remains of Harun al Raschid. And here by his side is . . ."

She waited, suddenly and oddly breathless for the rest.

". . . Nissa, daughter of Fayed b' Jaffar, the last of the Barmecides. Does that strike a chord in your memory?"

She shook her head in negation.

"The last of the Barmecides, do you hear? My bitter enemies! I was reincarnated, but I did not think you would be also. So you followed me from the depths. You were not content to poison me in the old world. You know what I mean. I was supposed to have

died of an internal ailment. Certainly I did! An ailment brought on by the insidious poison you fed me. That was why I ordained your death. And why I commanded you be buried by my side.

"Enter, my dear! Return from whence you came!"

HE FLUNG the door wide and Delia caught sight of an immense room, shadowed by the dim lights from torches placed at intervals against the walls. She backed away from Grant.

He smiled and stepped toward her. But as she started to turn to run from him he leaped forward with a single bound and grasped her wrist with a sinewy, sweaty hand. A terrible struggle developed there in the dim-lit cavern. Delia was strong for a woman, with large hands muscled from a lifetime of sports. But she was still a woman. Time and again Grant struck savage blows, blows which brought the blood, which tore the flesh of her face, which pounded pain into her breasts and groin. For Grant was trying to wreak the vengeance of centuries on her. The last blow sent her staggering, a blow to her middle, and following that one to the side of her jaw. Darkness folded her gently to its breast.

SHE came to her senses slowly, painfully. She was lying on the bare and slimy earthen floor. She was helpless to move. Ropes bound her hands, feet, neck and ankles. She could turn her head however. There was a creaking sound to her right. She turned her head in its direction and saw Grant bent over the lid of what appeared to be a sarcophagus. Suddenly it opened, as of its own will. He staggered a bit as the lid flew back. She saw him move forward again, then bend over the burial coffin. A scream rose to her lips

and echoed horribly around the walls. For from the depths of the sarcophagus something human, yet not human, rose to a sitting position and fastened fingers around Grant's throat . . .

When Hassid, with Ali b' Gomar and ten of his tribe trailing, came into the room, they found Grant bent over the opened sarcophagus, dead. About his throat were marks like fingers make in strangling. They stepped gingerly past the body. Ali deciphered the Arabic description on the tomb with tremulous words:

"The resting place of Nissa, daughter of Fayed b' Jaffar, Chamberlain to Harun al Raschid, before his downfall. Here she lies, waiting for the arrival of the Caliph on the day of his reincarnation. For he will return to occupy the sarcophagus made for him by Nissa . . ."

There was nothing in the sarcophagus but a shape of dust, a shape which

could have been a woman. They left Grant there. Their eyes searched for the woman who should have been there also. But nothing of her was to be seen. Suddenly, as one, they turned and fled the room, closing the door behind them with a crash as of doom. Nor did any of them see the clothes about the shape of what had once been Gordon Grant disintegrate into nothingness.

Nor did they hear a low, husky voice say:

"Come to my arms, lover. I have waited many centuries for this . . ."

Was it the wind which did not exist that made the dust move in Nissa's tomb? Or was that a hand, with a peculiar birthmark on the joint of the right thumb, that reached out of the sarcophagus and gently touched the already moulding flesh of Gordon Grant, the charming Gordon Grant . . . ?

THE END

## STRANGE FACTS IN NATURE

By MILDRED MURDOCH

**ALBINOS:** Albinism is a condition in which living tissue contains no color pigment. Occasionally a human being is born an albino, his hair and skin being colorless, his eyes pink. This pinkness is caused by the blood showing through the veins of the retina. More frequently than in man, this condition appears in both domesticated and wild animals. Albino fish, frogs, and snakes also have been found. Very often plant albinos occur, when no chlorophyll, or green coloring matter, is present. The reason for albinism is one of the unsolved puzzles of science.

**LONGEVITY of Animals:** There are only a few animals, as there are but few men, who attain an age over a hundred years. Elephants live for about seventy years, though some are said to have lived up to a hundred years, or even more. It has been difficult for scientists to judge the age attained by the longer-lived beasts. The largest animal of all, the whale, is estimated to live to about the age of one hundred. It has been alleged that some birds living in captivity, such as parrots, vultures and swans, have lived to be seventy to nearly a hundred years old. Turtles are the only creatures which we can be quite sure live to well over a hundred.

**MERMAIDS:** A member of the sea cow family, the dugong, probably gave rise to the mermaid myth. The round head of this creature bobbing on the waves, and in the manner in which the mother carries her baby around, does somewhat resemble a human being. The dugong has a broad, forked tail, as does the typical mermaid. It took a little imagination to convert this fat, unattractive dark animal into the beautiful creatures, half fish, half maiden with flowing blond hair, which lonely seamen of old used to fancy they saw sunning themselves on tropical islands.

**A WHALE that Kills:** The killer whale has very likely been responsible for many of the sea-serpent stories which have appeared in the newspapers from time to time. This animal has on its back a huge fin which is six feet tall. When the whale is swimming just below the surface, this fin waves in the air and looks very like the neck of a serpent. Meeting any sea serpent yet imagined would be preferable to running into one of these killer whales. Their strength and ferocity are terrific. They will attack anything, even whales much larger than themselves, and literally eat them alive.

\* \* \*

# READER'S PAGE



## GETTING TOO THIN

Sirs:

Looking through the latest FA and AS I find that you are presenting new writers and refuse to reprint stories. I agree wholeheartedly with you on this point. Anyone saying that late sf has gone to the dogs is nuts.

But I notice that both of your magazines are getting a bit thin. They were 244 pages at one time—and only 25c. Then you dropped to 212, and finally 178 pages. Still, because of your exceptionally good stories I was willing to forgive you. But 162 is going too far! 20c is all the mag is worth now.

I am, however, a rabid reader of FA and AS. I have nearly half of the issues of FA and hope to complete my collection soon. Some of the outstanding stories you have published, in my opinion, are: "Warrior of the Dawn," "Sons of the Deluge," "Bridge of Light," "Children of the Golden Amazon," "Ice Queen," "The Green Man," "I remember Lemuria," and "Around the Universe." Your best period, I believe, was during the time you published stories like: "Mystery of the Lost Race," "Craig's Book," "Empress of Mars," "Carbon Copy Killer," "Shadow of the Sphinx," "Minions of the Tiger," "The Sword and the Pool," "Forever Is too Long," and "Hidden City."

Now for a few suggestions. I think that you need more pages. Also, I liked the back cover features you used to present. I don't care for too many fact articles. You're supposed to have a fiction magazine!

Also, why not reprint all the Scientific Mysteries in one huge volume and sell it as a book—or on the newsstands as a 50-center. I'm sure the public would buy it. If you can't do this, explain why.

As an ending to this letter, let me thank you for the wonderful issues you have been putting out. Orchids to the interiors and the covers. . . . I dare anyone to write and say they want to correspond with me.

Gordon Mack, Jr.,  
Box 138,  
Lake Arthur, La.

*You kinda hit on a tender spot when you mentioned the recent cut in pages of FA, Gordon. Fact is, we just don't have the paper to make the book bigger. We were all hoping that paper shortages would end soon, but things seem as bad today as they were a year ago—even worse. But bear with us, and possibly in a short while we'll surprise you. ....Ed.*

## WANTS "GOLDEN ATOM"

Sirs:

I have never written you a letter, though I have been a reader of your magazines, FA and AS for more years than I can recall. Now I have a request to make. A number of years ago you published two stories, "The Golden Atom," and "People of the Golden Atom." I would like to find copies of the issues that had these two stories. I wonder if any fans might have copies they would be willing to part with?

Meanwhile, I'll correspond with any fans who care to write me.

William J. Ashton,  
1409 River St.,  
Enterprise, Ore.

*We'd like to send you copies of the issues you want, but we just don't have them on hand. Isn't the story you're thinking of, "The Girl in the Golden Atom?" .....Ed.*

## HIS FAVORITE STORY

Sirs:

Your May issue of FA was a real fine one. All of the shorts were good, but what I especially want to mention is "Forgotten Worlds." It was about the best story I have ever read. I fairly lived through it. I would like to compliment Lawrence Chandler, the author. He did a very fine job.

Ralph R. Ellis, Jr.,  
14627 S. Prairie Ave.,  
Lawndale, Calif.

*We'll pass along the compliment to Larry Chandler, Ralph. ....Ed.*

## CONSISTENTLY GOOD

Sirs:

This is my first letter to the Reader's Page. I read all the sf-fantasy books, so I hope you will be pleased with this fact. I just don't think the others are worth bothering with. I find that they have only one or two good stories per issue, and you seldom have one bad story in many issues.

The May issue was one of the best in a long time. The novel, "Forgotten Worlds" was one of the best stories you have ever published. The novel so far outranked the short stories that I won't comment on them. Although, they were good too . . .

Now for a word about your covers. I think that Bob Jones is wonderful. His cover for the May issue is one of his best. The only cover of

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his that I didn't enjoy was the February one. And the reason I didn't care for that cover was because of the subject matter, not the artist. That cover would have been more likely to repulse, than attract readers.

Nan Redcorn,  
127 Kentucky Ave.,  
So. Clinton, Tenn.

Many thanks for your nice letter, Nan, and now that you've broken the ice, let's hear from you again. ....Ed.

## A NINE-YEAR TOAST

Sirs:

It has been nine years now that I've been reading FA and AS, and now I think it is time that I wrote you and told you how much I enjoy your two great magazines. I doubt if I ever missed an issue while I was a civilian, and in the two years I was in the Navy I tried to secure them as often as possible. However, overseas I did have a little trouble.

I truly can say that I enjoy your two magazines as much today as I did nine years ago, and I hope to say the same thing nine years from now. So here's wishing long life and plenty of good stories for FA and AS.

Will Valentine,  
2080 Grand Ave.,  
Bronx, 53, N.Y.

We'll drink to that, Will. ....Ed.

## LIVINGSTON'S BEST

Sirs:

"Queen of the Panther World" in the July issue is the best Livingston's done to date. This author is coming along nicely. Please give us more of this kind.

All in all, the July issue was superb. The Reader's Page was below par though. . . . Right now I'd like to say that I have a few FA and AS backnumbers that I hope to dispose of. First come first served.

James W. Ayers  
609 1st. St.  
Attalla, Ala.

Glad you liked Livingston's story so well, James. How do you like his short novel in this issue? Ed.

## WANTED: FEMME FANS

Sirs:

First off, I'd like to thank you for your kindness in printing my letter in your January issue. The results I got were gratifying.

Without a doubt, the July number is the best you've produced in quite a long time. The cover, by newcomer Ramon Naylor, was a masterpiece. In my opinion this artist ranks right along with Finlay, MacCauley, Jones, and St. John. By all means, let's have more by him.

Berkeley Livingston really came through with a humdinger of a story this time. The light, breezy style of "Queen of the Panther World" was something new to me. And the idea of writing

himself into the story showed originality on the author's part. This yarn goes down as one of my ten favorite novels from FA. Congrats, Berk! . . . The interiors on the story, by Rod Ruth, were excellent.

Old "word wizard" Richard Shaver penned a neat little classic in his "Mirrors of the Queen." Although the man-thru-the-mirror plot has been done many times before, Dick's unique style made this story stand out as one of the best shorts I've ever read, and I've read plenty, believe me. The Finlay pics for the story were GREAT! In fact, almost as good as the cover . . . almost.

"Contract for a Body" was wonderful. Guess I'm just a sucker for love and happy endings, but you can put me down as definitely wanting more of this type, preferably dished out by the same author.

Departments and features up to par. Reader's Page, much too short. Here's hoping that my letter will see print, as I'd like to hear from femme fans 17 to 20. I'm 21 myself.

Charles L. Morris,  
50 Harris St.,  
Anderson, S. C.

*We're glad you liked the July issue so well, Chuck—and now that you've read this number, also with a Livingston novel, what do you say? As to Naylor, yep, he's a good man. . . . Ed.*

# NO READER'S PAGE

Sirs:

"The Man From Yesterday" in the August Issue was super, though I found it a little too lengthy. Give my regards to Lee Francis, it was his best to date.

The front cover did the novel justice. Sort of reminded me of St. John. As to the rest of the issue, "Unfinished Business" was the best of the shorts. All in all, a very good issue—except there was no Reader's Page. Please don't discontinue this feature!

James W. Ayers,  
609 1st St.,  
Attalla, Ala.

*You sort of hit the jackpot this month, James—two letters in one issue. Maybe that will help make up for the missing reader's page you mentioned. We apologize. Ed.*

# LOVE? FIFTY-FIFTY

Sirs:

Just finished reading the June issue of FA, and was very disappointed in the lead novel, "The Black Arrow." For awhile when I was reading it, I thought I was 13 again and reading Indian fairy tales. I got a kick out of them when I was that age, but now that I'm twenty, those stories seem just plain childish. You say Jamieson Wood is a new writer. Well, unless he changes his style, I won't be one of his fans.

I was glad to see Tenneshaw's name in this issue. I can truly say I wasn't one bit let down by his story. I like humorous stories mixed in with my

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serious ones, and this time, Tenneshaw really dished out a swell yarn. Keep him busy producing more of the same and "Come Along With Me." He's a good writer.

That man Jones paints covers that make me leap in frenzied delight. I just love his quiet covers. Finlay will always be my idol for interiors, but I'm afraid that Jones has him beat when it comes to covers. I hate those blaring covers that knock your eyes out when you first see them on the newsstand. So I'm happy to see that one cover artist puts out lovely, quiet ones for a change.

All this controversy about love in stf has prompted me to put my two cents worth in. You fans who say that strong love interest belongs in stf are knutz! A certain amount of it is o.k. but when it comes down to the level that it is in the Toka stories, I say it should be thrown out with a mighty heave. Don't get me wrong, I have nothing against love, but in my stories, I like it on the level where most of the stories are now—boy meets girl, boy saves girl, boy gets girl. Now for a few comments to the fans whose letters appeared recently.

Eva Firestone: Hurray for you! Should we send copies of true love and spicy stories to the fans who want a lot of mush?

Walter Schwartz: We gals don't mean to leave out *all* love interest, but to leave the deep goo to the love mags.

Bob Alloway: "Spirit of the Keys" was a good story. Love interest was good here. . . .

Willard Shenkel: Shake, pardner! No more Toka stories—else leave out the mush.

Surprisingly I can't complain about any of the inside illos this trip. They were all good—especially Finlay.

I greatly enjoyed the fact articles you run on different subjects each month. I hope you don't run out of them.

If you'll allow me, ed, I'd like to put in a call here for all fans in the Topeka area or the surrounding states who are interested in forming a science-fiction club to get in touch with me. We have a few members but we need a lot more. Well, see you next issue.

Linda Bowles,  
931 N. Jackson,  
Topeka, Kansas.

O.k. Linda, we'll kinda call it a draw. Fifty-fifty fair enough? Or does anybody else have something to say on the subject yet? If so, write in. . . .Ed.

## COME ON, READERS!

LET'S HEAR FROM YOU!

We want your opinions—good or bad—and we'll print as many of your letters as space permits.

# "WAVE-SQUIRTERS"

★ By JOHN LANE ★

**T**HE exploration of high frequency radio waves (microwaves), and their subsequent application to radar, the proximity fuse, Loran navigation and a host of other things, required the parallel development of antennas.

Those who remember the early days of radio recall that an antenna was simply a piece of wire strung up in the air almost anywhere and connected to the radio. Lately the public has become conscious of antennas through the installation of so many FM and television sets. These gadgets require highly elaborate antennas in order to function properly. In fact, unless correct antennas are installed, dealers will refuse to sell their sets.

The reason for all this follows definite laws, naturally. As the frequency of radio waves becomes higher and as their wave-length decreases, they behave more and more like light waves. That is, high frequency electromagnetic waves travel in very straight lines, limited in distance by the Earth's curvature. Furthermore, the antennas from which the waves are projected are small, have a definite physical shape and bear no resemblance to the "old wire in the air." To transmit these high frequency waves into space from a radar, an FM, or a television station, the conventional coil, coupled inductively to the "tank" of the transmitter, is used. From here on in, things change.

The antenna may take the shape of a straight wire, split in the middle and of a predetermined and exact length. This is called a "dipole." Or it may be in the form of a "horn!" Yes, a horn shaped exactly like the mouth of a musical instrument, like a funnel. A horn of this type sprays its waves into space in the same manner that a trumpet sprays its sound.

Probably more common eventually than these two systems, is the use of the parabolic reflector. Using a small antenna which is located at the focus of a parabola, radio waves are sent in a beam which is almost like that of an automobile headlight. It may be as narrow as three degrees.

**I**T IS a fundamental principle of optics, that, if you take a light source like an electric lamp, locate it in the focus of a mirror shaped like a paraboloid, the waves will be transmitted in one direction in the form of a circular beam. The identical thing happens with radio waves. The small antenna (usually a dipole) is placed directly in the focus of a sheet metal or a screen paraboloid. From this emanates a circular beam which can be directed exactly as a flashlight.

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Many times in newsreels of aircraft and Naval vessels, these funny-looking paraboloids can be seen mounted in strategic locations, usually as high above the water as they can be for the greatest range.

As radio progresses it will be possible to see these more and more often. Radio "hams" are employing them to a greater extent than ever before as they probe the higher frequencies. Television, telegraph, radio, and television long distance relay stations are using them too.

At one time it was hard to imagine radio waves leaving a plain old piece of wire, but with these advances it becomes very clear just how they manage to get from the transmitter into empty space. The principle of reflection of radio waves which lies behind all this can be readily shown by a simple experiment. One of the easiest types of uni-directional antennas to erect, consists of a dipole (as before) connected to a transmitter. Behind the wire and parallel with it is another wire. The second wire, connected to nothing, acts just like a plane mirror in back of a candle—it sends the waves one way.

Watch the lavish use of screens and reflectors in the near future to all forms of high-frequency radio. Every little antenna must have its reflector.

## Kings of Fire

## and Water

**By J. R. MARKS**

IN THE wilds of Cambodia live two unusual people known as the Kings of Fire and Water. Very few people knew of their existence and they might have been considered a fable if it weren't for regular communications between them and the King of Cambodia. Each year they exchanged presents. The Cambodian gifts were passed from tribe to tribe till they reached their destination. The tribes who have the Kings of Fire and Water are the Chreais or Jaray, who live in the wooded mountains and table lands between Cambodia and Annam. Their kings have no political authority. They handle only the mystic and spiritual functions. One account states that they live in solitude, never meeting each other and never seeing a human face. They live in seven towers on top of seven mountains, and every year they pass from one tower to another. People come within a certain distance of the towers and throw to them what is needed for their subsistence. Their term of office as king lasts seven years, which is the time necessary to live in all the towers successively. Many die before their term is out. The offices are hereditary in two royal families although it is not a desirable office. When a vacancy occurs, all the eligible men hide out in the forests.





The people go out and search for them and the first one that is found is made King of Fire or Water.

One traveler reported that the kings are much feared because they possess an evil eye, so everyone tries to stay out of their way, and the kings cough to announce their approach so that they may be avoided. The sacred kings are not allowed to die a natural death which would lower their reputation. When one of the kings is terribly sick, the elders hold a consultation and if they decide that he cannot regain his health, they stab him to death. Then his body is burned and his ashes are worshipped for five years. Part of them are given to his widow and she has to carry them in an urn on her back for the rest of her life.

**T**HE Fire King is the more important of the two. His supernatural powers have never been questioned, and he officiates at weddings, sacrifices, and affairs in honor of the Yan or spirit. On these occasions a special place is set for him, and the path on which he approaches is spread with white cotton cloth.

The reason for keeping the royal office in one family is because this family is in possession of certain talismans which would lose their power if passed from one family to another. There are three talismans: the fruit of a creeper called Cui, which is supposed to have been gathered at the time of the flood but which is still fresh and green; a rattan, which is very old but continues to bear flowers that never fade; and a sword containing a Yan or spirit who guards it and works miracles with it. The spirit in it is said to be that of a slave whose blood accidentally fell on the blade while it was being forged, and who killed himself to pay for his involuntary offense.

The Water King is said to be able to bring a flood that would drown the earth. The Fire King can hide the sun and cause men and animals to fall into a deep sleep, simply by pulling his magic sword a few inches from its scabbard. If he were to draw it all the way out, the world would come to an end. For this reason the sword is kept wrapped in cotton and finest silk. Among the usual annual presents sent by the King of Cambodia were rich

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materials to wrap the sacred sword. In return, the Kings of Fire and Water sent him a huge wax candle and two calabashes, one with rice and the other filled with sesame. The candle held the impression of the Fire King's middle finger and was thought to contain the seed of fire. This sacred candle was kept for divine ceremonies. The rice and sesame were a special gift from the Water King. He was the king of rain and the fruits of the earth were given to the people by his magic. In times of calamity, a little of this sacred sesame was sprinkled on the ground to appease the wrath of the maleficent spirits.

## SEA ARMOR

★ BY KAY BENNETT ★

ALTHOUGH the diving bell was in use in some work it was almost impossible for a diver to do any extensive work "on the bottom" because of the inadequacy of lighter equipment to move around in. To overcome that difficulty a relatively insignificant inventor named Augustus Siebe invented the first diving suit. It consisted of a copper helmet attached to the water-proofed jacket which reached to the waist. Although it had been an advancement it was also dangerous. Should the diver trip or be knocked on his side by the under current, water had access to the interior of the jacket. Unless quickly rescued he drowned.

Revising his invention Siebe devised the one-piece suit which enclosed the diver in an airtight gear. The suit was first used during the salvage work on the English ship *Royal George* in 1840. Except for refinement of the principle the diving suit used today is essentially the same as developed by Siebe.

The modern diver's equipment consists of corselet and helmet, waterproof dress, weighted boots along with the necessary ballast. This generally consists of pairs of lead weights attached to the chest and back. The boots present the most interesting part of his paraphernalia and are important to the success of his work. They are made of stout materials consisting of heavy leather to which is attached thick wooden soles. To assist him in his descent, lead weights approximately 18 pounds are riveted to the wooden bottoms. The heavy foot gear along with the 40 pound ballast assist him in maintaining equilibrium at the sea bottom. The weight of his equipment is about 175 pounds so that upon entering the water the average diver and equipment weigh approximately 375 pounds.

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